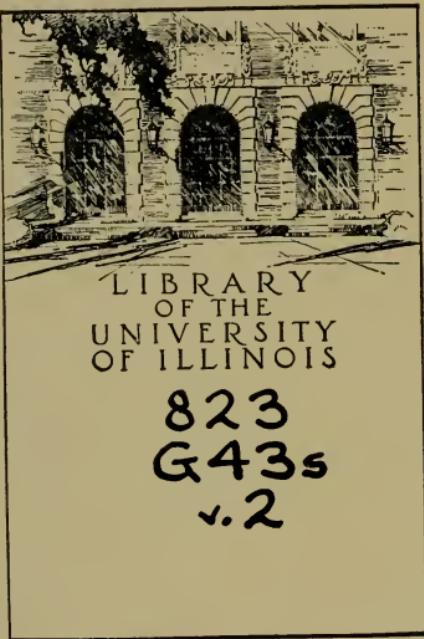




STEYNEVILLE.







Sydney Smith.





STEYNEVILLE;

OR,

FATED FORTUNES.

Being the Memoirs of an Unextraordinary Man.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY

HÉLÈNE E. A. GINGOLD.

“ ‘Tis more by fortune than by merit.’

SHAKESPEARE,

“ But who can turn the stream of destiny ?”

SPENSER.

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CHAPTER I.

I TAKE the following from my journal :—

“ March 29th.—To-day is one for which Almyra Marlande has been long wishing. The day of days for her, when she is to be presented at Court.

“ Annie, too, has been begged to accompany them—I mean Allie, my lady, and Lady Mary Wortley—but she has steadily refused all entreaties, and says, with her gentle smile, that she prefers to stay at home, as the bustle and noise would only bewilder and confuse her. Allie, with a merry laugh, declares it to be an excuse for remaining at home, to have a nice tête-a-tête with le beau saint

cousin. At which Annie laughs too, but I see it is only to hide her confusion.

“Later on.—How beautiful she looked ! O, how very, very beautiful in her shining silk dress, and her loosely hanging hair. How well, how upright she carried herself, swerving neither to the right nor to the left, which was perfectly marvellous, considering the highness of heels. And she knew it too, of course ; her very smile was ‘tell me, have you ever seen so fair a creature ?’ No, no, never ! Then as she marched up and down the room, to show the two stay-at-homes the full magnificence of her apparel, curtseying now and then, who should come bounding in but Cleopatra’s abject slave and admirer, Marc Antony, the dog. Another young lady, dictated by prudence and common sense, would have warded off the caresses of the animal ; not so Miss Marlande the wilful. For down on the ground she knelt, with her robes, like Ophelia’s, wide outspread, and gave him back kiss for kiss.

“Later still.—She has gone. Ugh, how dull and cheerless the place is without her !

“March 31st, evening.—I have heard to-

day the whole triumph of yesterday. When Miss Marlande entered the apartment where her Majesty and Royal Consort were seated, there was a buzz of admiration, and everyone asked who the new beauty was. As she approached Prince George after having received a few gracious words from her liege queen, and after having kissed hands (at which miss had the impudence afterwards to turn up her nose, telling us it smelt dreadfully of snuff), he raised her and said laughingly, ‘ Faith ! Miss Marlande, having heard speak of you so much, and knowing you to be presented to-day, I have been worrying my Lord Lyttleton here the whole time for the name of every lady, thinking one of ’em might be you. But when you did come, miss, I had no occasion to ask any more, for I knew it must be you without it.’

“ A pretty compliment truly, with which miss’s vanity was doubtless much gratified.

“ When they repaired to their coach again, there were no less than *sixty* gentlemen ready to hand the young beauty to her place, and some pretty squabbling ensued amongst these gallants, I can assure you. At last

miss was assisted to her place by an old gentleman, handsome despite his fifty odd years, whose trembling white fingers showed all the more to advantage those precious stones which glittered on them. When all was ready to start off again this gentleman thrust his face in at the carriage door, and with a smile on his thin lips begged my cousin not to forget the ‘Marquis de Sansgêne,’ who would with my lady’s permission visit the castle. There is no hope for me now. I might have contended against one man, against two even, but *sixty!* no thank you.

“April 2nd.—I am a little more resigned to my fate, because I don’t see the use of being otherwise. It would not help me in the least. Besides how could I expect a woman like my cousin to care a rap about a poor bookworm. Well, let that pass ; I am content to see her admired, and almost happy, though she is too ambitious ever to be thoroughly contented. The Marquis de Sansgêne, true to his promise, called to-day, and a host of others. Some strange ladies too, and to see Allie move about

amongst them, snapping her fingers, as it were, at the women's jealousy, made me feel almost inclined to laugh. Poets sing of the courage of soldiers in the heat of a battle, even when the opposing parties are equally numbered as man against man; but braver far are those who, like my cousin, wage a war, a bloodless polite war, and thus the worst of wars, against thousands.

“April 3rd.—I have received orders to be prepared to depart on the 17th of next month. I shall go with a glad heart, I can't help it, but I still feel savage with my cousin's admirers, most of all with the marquis, who is really an honourable gentleman, but who professes too sincere a liking for Almyra for my taste. I should feel relieved if I dared wring a few of those puppies' heads off their shoulders. I believe the world would be rather the better for it. My lady has complained of a slight indisposition, and is confined to her room. When I went to visit her this afternoon she was lying on the couch. With an expression on her face that I had only seen once before (in the unhappy business

with the scoundrel de la Motte, who, by-the-bye, had not since been heard of) a loving beautiful expression, strange to those features where cynical good-humour usually predominated. When I entered she received me very kindly, and bidding me sit near her, took one of my hands in her own.

“ ‘ Dear Madame,’ said I, anxiously, ‘ are you better ? ’

“ ‘ You good fellow, yes,’ she returned, laughingly. ‘ I have only a pain in my side, but it will go off soon, here— ’ pointing to her heart, ‘ and extending to my back.’

“ ‘ Has Dr. —— been to see you ? ’

“ ‘ Yes, he says it is not much, and that I must keep myself quiet, otherwise it might turn to something serious. I suppose you know,’ she added, casually, ‘ that heart disease is in our family ? ’

“ ‘ Heart disease ! ’ I echoed, ‘ indeed, dear lady, I did not.’

“ ‘ Well, it is, but that’s nothing, because my father, God rest his soul,’ said my lady, reverently, ‘ died at seventy of this same illness, and my grandfather at eighty-four—all at advanced ages. But the most curious

fact is, that all my relations subject to it have died suddenly and unexpectedly.'

"' Faith !' I said, 'that's curious indeed.'

"' Yes, that's not all neither,' replied my lady, with something of a smile. 'If you think that strange, what will you think of what I'm about to tell you now? It has been prophesied years and years ago that all the males, and the two last of the line, a male and female, should all die suddenly, and that with us our line shall be extinct. Comforting that, is it not? Particularly as the prognostication in all other respects has been true. O, if Alingdale would but marry, for I cannot help feeling sad with the thought perpetually haunting me, that our honourable name should die out. There, I'm a fool, a weak fool,' concluded my lady, 'and I know you think so too.'

"' Indeed I do not, dear lady,' I returned, kissing her hand.

"' There, there,' she answered. 'I've troubled you long enough with my chatter, and I think I will take a short nap.'

" I bowed and rose to go.

"' Nay, good-night, my dear, dear boy,'

the lady said, rising, ‘good-night, and God bless you.’ Taking my two hands in hers, she leant forward and kissed me tenderly on the forehead.

“ It was like the touch of lips that I had never known—a mother’s; the unbidden tears started to my eyes, and my voice was broken, as I said in reply—

“ ‘ Good-night, dear lady.’

“ April 2nd.—‘Good-night ! God bless you !’ The sound of her voice had scarcely ceased to vibrate in my ears, when I awoke the next morning with a confused notion of hearing cries below, and much running too and fro. Listening for a few minutes more, and finding something of a rather turbulent character had occurred, I hastily dressed, and running to the stairs-head, leaned over. The first person that met my sight was old Hilbert on the landing below, who stood wringing his hands in an ecstasy of grief. Amazed, I called to him and asked him what the matter was ?

“ ‘ O, Master Harold,’ he answered, with an awful sob, and turning up a face perfectly ghastly in its sorrow, ‘ come down, for

God's sake ! She—she's gone—my lady's dead !'

" It was true, true. Appalled beyond all words, I hastened downstairs, and scarcely knowing what I did, went into my lady's room, where I saw her pale and motionless on the couch. I know there were several people in the room, but besides the one who had been so kind to me, I only saw two—Almyra and Annie—Annie who had fainted, and Almyra with her face turned aside, unwilling, in her pride, that others should be witness of whatever grief she felt.

" April 4th.—' God bless you ! Good-night ! My dear, dear boy ! ' O those words, how I prized them. Good-night, sweet lady, may all good angels have you in their keeping. I can write no more, my heart is almost broken.

" April 5th. * * * *

" April 6th. * * * *

" April 7th. * * * *

" April 8th. * * * *

" April 9th.—At last I can take up my pen again. Years seem to have elapsed since I last wrote. And I see it is only four

days ago. Four days ago ! Ah me ! How much has happened in such a little space. My lady is sleeping with the rest of her kin in the family mausoleum. How gloomy it all seems. How fearfully strange. I think if I had my choice to die, I would like my death to be like that dear lady's, peaceful, calm, and blessed, with words of love and holiness like she uttered to me on my lips. . . . I have not seen my lord yet. He arrived directly after the funeral, and has kept his room ever since. My two cousins have just been to see me, for I have been ill and in bed. Annie's grief must have been very great. I know she loved her, and as we spoke of our benefactress she burst out sobbing, despite her efforts, as if her heart would break. Directly after she left Almyra appeared, very pale, very calm, with her eyes completely hidden by their lids. She bent down in her stately way and kissed me with sisterly affection on the cheek. I was even more astonished at the change in her countenance than in her sister's. Hers was not the wild passionate grief of love, but something that chilled me to the heart. It seemed to me

that this girl, or woman, had not sorrowed over the loss of her benefactress, but had looked upon the death in a selfish, cruel light; as a something that had taken away her position in the world, that she would have become so well. For the present she sat down, never raising her eyes once, and waited for me to commence the conversation.

"But the words stuck in my throat somehow; but I made her understand that she looked changed.

"'Grief changes us all,' she answered, in hard, dry tones, unusual to her.

"'Grief, Almyra!' I ejaculated. 'Yes, grief changes us all. Ambition and selfishness, too.'

"'I suppose,' she continued, not noticing what I said, 'we must go back to Steyneville now?'

"'Yes,' I said, with a sigh, 'we must.'

"It cost the ambitious creature an effort, but she said 'When?'

"'As soon as possible,' I returned.

"She bit her lips and breathed quickly.

"'Dear girl,' I said, taking her hand and kneeling by her side, 'if it pains you to leave

this roof, which has sheltered you so kindly, and which you have graced so well, believe me I feel for you more than you think. And if I could—but it is impossible. We cannot stay.'

"‘But if my lord asks—’ she began, eagerly.

"‘I was stung to the quick, ‘O, Allie, Allie,’ I groaned, ‘would you really stay if he were to ask you to ?’

"‘She looked down hastily.

"‘How could I,’ she exclaimed, bitterly, ‘even if I would? It would be against *les convenances* !’

"‘But as his wife?’ I hazarded.

"‘For once during the intercourse the beautiful flashing eyes opened angry and scornful.

"‘His wife?’ she echoed, ‘his wife? Are you mad, cousin? My lord marry—and a poor portionless girl?’

"‘Yes,’ I persisted. ‘If he asks you to be his wife, would you accept him?’

"‘My lord is generous, but his generosity shall not be extended to me. He shall not say he took his wife out of pity; and so if he

asked I should say no,' she said, proudly.
‘A hundred times no, cousin. So let us drop the subject.’

“‘Nay,’ said I, ‘but if he *loves* you, and asks you—’

“She beat her foot on the ground as if to stifle some rising passion, and interrupted.

“‘Love, cousin Harold! My lord—I! Indeed, college must have made you into something of a dreamer, for what you say is wholly inconsistent.’

“‘And you,’ I continued, ‘are you altogether indifferent?’

“‘You have no right to ask me,’ she began, passionately.

“‘Dear heart,’ said I, gently, ‘indeed the question was not merely demanded out of idle curiosity. You must remember,’ I continued, sadly enough, ‘that I am your only guardian now, on this earth, though, God help me, I know how unworthy I am.’

“She looked at me curiously.

“‘Guardian! How can that be? You are to join the army, and we are going to Steyneville—’

“‘Yes, we are going to Steyneville—and

I—' It cost me an awful pang, because for years I had longed to obtain the opportunity of distinguishing myself, which was now impossible, since my kinswomen had no protector but myself.

" ' And you ? ' she enquired, as I paused.

" ' And I am going too—to stay with you, in the old house. I am not going to join the army at all. I think we three, with Batty and Birch, will have enough to live upon.'

" Almyra rose from her chair and paced the room rapidly. At last she stood in front of me, and looking at me fixedly, demanded —

" ' Is this your bravery, cousin, as a Steyneville, to stay at home like a woman ? '

" ' Bravery, Almyra ! ' I cried—but I stopped myself in time. I did not wish that she should know the true reason of my determination to refuse the post offered to me.

" ' Yes, bravery,' she reiterated. ' What ! is your ambition contented with a plot of rank grass, a bit of sky, and a roof ? O, this is like a man—and such as these are set up over women like myself. Yes, myself—even I would be ashamed to idle in dull

home, whilst glory and honour were to be won abroad.'

"But still to her bitter reproaches I answered no word.

"'Stay,' she said, suddenly, 'perhaps I am mistaken. Is it, can it be that you are so brave, so good to give up all the honours that a gentleman could win, for our sakes? Is it so?' She seized my hands and looked into my face. 'Yes, it is—I can read it. O, you are like your father, Harold—and that is the greatest and best praise I can give you, and,' hastily, 'you deserve to be blessed—and, indeed, I will try to make Steyneville what it should be to you—I will try very, very hard—'

"'As my—' I asked, eagerly.

"She looked at me sadly and placed her hand on my lips.

"'Hush! Not that, never that!' she returned. 'Ask some true, good gentlewoman to be that, but not me—not Almyra Marlande. Indeed, I am not worthy!' and so she left me.

CHAPTER II.

A WEEK passed on. In another four days we should be as strangers to Norton Castle, for our old home was in readiness to receive its former inmates, and the two faithful creatures, Batty and Birch, expressed their delight in two epistles affectionate in the extreme, albeit ill spelt.

I had seen my lord several times, and no muscle or feature of that haughty spirit was changed, not a trace of grief or emotion were observable on those lineaments, although I am sure he had loved (in his way) his kinswoman. He frequently begged me to remain a while longer, but this I steadily, though gratefully refused, at the same time giving him to understand that it was my in-

tention to give up any thought of accepting the post he had so kindly sought and obtained for me. He gave vent to his feelings of astonishment by an uplifting of the dark brows and a short whistle; but, unlike Almyra, understood the reason of my refusal, and I think, liked me none the less for it.

It was late one night, as I closed with a sigh the book I had been reading, and lifting the light prepared to leave the room. As I did this, I thought I heard the sound of voices in the passage, which after a while I had no difficulty in recognizing as my lord's and Almyra's. Presently the door opened, and Almyra, carrying a taper, and with a large black lace gracefully thrown over her head, entered.

"Cousin," said I, gravely, "I thought you had retired hours ago—see, it is past one o'clock. And may I ask you with whom you were speaking just now?"

"Certainly—my lord. But I've come to ask you a very important question—to me at all events," she answered, without the slightest hesitation.

“ What is it ? ” I asked, sorrowfully. I do not know why, but the idea of the two together, the ambitious girl and the unprincipled man, chilled me, and I felt as if the light and hope of my life were both gone, and all was cold, dreary, and blank.

“ Harold, dear Harold,” said the girl, “ we are leaving the day after to-morrow.”

“ Yes—what then ? ”

“ At the invitation of my lord let us stay here longer ? ”

“ We cannot,” I answered, briefly.

“ Cannot ? ” echoed my kinswoman, holding the taper above her head and looking at me with proud earnestness, “ cannot ? What should prevent us, kinsman, pray ? ”

“ Everything,” I returned, somewhat warmly.

“ And what in particular ? ” demanded the wayward girl, with scornful emphasis. O, how distinctly I remember the light of the taper, making her eyes shine with a brilliancy that was perfectly startling.

“ My lord to begin with,” I answered, calmly.

“ You show your gratitude to his lordship,

cousin, vastly well," she remarked, unflinchingly, "for all the kindness he has done you, too."

I bowed, but said no word.

"And if I refuse to obey your high and mighty commands," she pursued, "and will stay here at my lord's invitation?"

"Almyra Marlande would never do that. She is too proud to lose a fair name in this manner," I replied, gravely.

"O, ah!—I forget. Yes, you're right—people would talk, wouldn't they? But if I did not care for all their twopenny scandals, and stayed here, what then?"

"If Almyra Marlande thus sought to ruin her reputation, her kinsman would endeavour to right her to the world."

"Why?" her curiosity aroused in spite of herself.

"For two reasons. Firstly, for one other's sake; secondly and lastly, for her own," I answered.

"The other's sake is--?" she asked, wonderingly.

"My dear father's—your uncle's," I said, reverently.

Two tears started to those beautiful eyes at the mention of the name of one whom, as a self-willed, heedless child, she had regarded with a passionate adoration. She turned her head aside so I should not see her emotion and said in a low voice—

“Be it so—we will go.”

Then bidding me good-night she went away as she came, like a stately, beautiful phantom, with her long, black dress trailing far behind her, and the lace on her head half obscuring her fair face.

* * * * *

Ah, yes! Steynevile was dull to one of us, when we had been already there for a couple of weeks. Almyra pined as much as her rebellious spirit would allow her. Annie flourished, as the sweet girl would have done anywhere, where peace and quiet was, and I—simply vegetated. The ancient place looked certainly much better than it did in old days, for Birch and Batty had taken care to make it as comfortable as possible, and as the good old woman said, with tears in her eyes, “She hoped that the young master and Mistress Allie wouldn’t miss the grand castle

so much, now that they had looked after it a bit, and as for Miss Annie, God bless her heart, she was sure to be pleased anywhere"—an opinion I fully endorsed and coincided with. Even the garden, a once impossible-to-be-cultivated wilderness, was toned and primed down to something like order, although to have achieved an entire change for the better would have been a moral and physical impossibility. The rooms, too, were literally shining with cleanliness, though perhaps not particularly remarkable for their elegance or grandeur. My fair kinswoman, on seeing them, immediately turned up her nose expressive of supreme contempt for her surroundings, and exclaimed in a dolorous voice—

"O Lord ! Harold, who on earth furnished this place ?"

"My ancestor, Sir Blunderbuss Ferrando Eselfleish Catzenkoff del Steyneville," I returned, somewhat grimly, like a very ungallant person that I was.

"Dear me !" remarked the young lady, lifting up her hands in comic dismay, "what a frightful savage he must have been. D'ye ever see such taste ? Now look at that

chair—could anyone look pretty sitting in it? I defy Venus to appear graceful—”

“Venus perhaps would not, but Al—” began her kinsman, gallantly.

“That will do!” cries miss. “Now show me about the place—I’m sure I will never get used to it. Never mind, lead on, cousin. Besides, I think my Marquis Sansgêne will soon appear on the scene, and then—”

“And then, Allie?” asked Annie, reproachfully.

“And then—nothing, you green, good girl!” said miss, laughing. “There, you two go in front arm-in-arm, and I’ll follow—a couple of saints, and a disciple marching hard in their footsteps. Only saints don’t blush, at least I think not,” she added, turning to her sister, with a mischievous look.

When a month elapsed without anyone coming to see us, Almyra Marlande became very bitter, very haughty and very angry. Nothing would please her, nothing afforded her the slightest entertainment or amusement, and to be sure it was a sorry time for the bright, merry, brilliant girl who was only happy when surrounded by a score of

admirers, and envied by a thousand plainer women.

I may here insert a curious incident, perhaps some may think it too trivial to be recounted, still, I write it because this part of my life was dull and tame indeed.

Our old neighbours, the Stapletons, had expressed a desire to see me. And agreeable to their wish I paid 'em an afternoon call. Sydney, who was travelling, they expected home in a few days, and so I found only my lady and her little niece, Violet. As my lady left the room for a few minutes, on some excuse, the child, who was about seven years old, advanced half-way towards me, and stood staring at me with great, wondering blue eyes.

Having a natural liking for children about this age, I held out my hand and asked her if she was afraid of me, as she did not move.

"O no—I am not a bit 'fraid of you," she answered, confidingly.

"Then why don't you come to me?"

"'Cause I likes looking at you best," returned the child, naively.

“ Looking at me--why ? ” I laughed.

“ Because you are Mr. Hally Ste—Ste—Sti—”

“ Steynevile. Yes, and what of it ? ”

“ What of it ? ” echoed the child, coming nearer and laying her little hand on the lappel of my sleeve, “ because you are so very cu-ri-ous and nasty—yes, nasty, certainly.”

“ Curious,” I said, taking her on my knee, “ and who told you that I was curious and nasty, eh ? ”

“ O no, you are nice—I think so—I know you cannot be so wicked,” returned the little maid, stroking my hair *pityingly*, “ as they say you are.”

“ Faith ! ” said I, the old adage of children and fools recurring to my mind, “ and what do they say, pray ? ”

“ Don’t you know ? Why, the other day, a little fat man, with a fringe round his head, an’ no hair on the top of it, came to see auntie ” (the abbé I presume) “ an’ said you went away from some castle, and took a beautiful—O such a beautiful lady with you, an’ then locked her up in a black dun john,

like the naughty giants do in fairy tales—an' wouldn't let her see nobody. There—now that's wicked, isn't it?"

"Yes," said I, gravely, "it's wicked to say things that are not true, because this is not."

"Well, you know, he didn't say it 'gsactly like I'm telling you—'cause he seemed to like you, an' said you were quite right. Then he cried because somebody he liked was dead—quite dead—an' he did look so funny—really he did—when he cried, an' then auntie told somebody else, an' said it was a shame, an' that you wanted to keep the beautiful lady all to yourself. That's wicked, isn't it? What people call jeal—jeal—something like that I know."

"And if I said all this was not true, would you believe me?" I asked, uneasy with the idea of such an absurd story going abroad.

"Believe you?" questioned Violet, looking at me earnestly. "Yes, I'm sure I do. But why do you look so sorry? O, please dear Mr. Hally, don't, don't cry. I'm so sorry for you," and the dear little maid laid her head on my shoulder and cried herself.

Soon after my Lady Stapleton reappeared, smiling. But knowing a woman as well as a man may smile and smile and be a villain, I coldly took leave of her, vowing within my own mind not to visit the family again in a hurry.

CHAPTER III.

ANNIE had gone to visit some of her poor. Almyra sat by the open window gazing listlessly on the grounds beneath, with an expression of calm indifference and perfect weariness that ill-accorded with her beauty and her youth.

I was scribbling a letter to Valerian, but my attention was not concentrated on it at all, inasmuch as my mind and eyes perpetually wandered off from the paper to the motionless figure a few yards off.

Giving up at length in despair a long-delayed duty, I laid down my pen, and broke in upon my kinswoman's meditations.

"And what is Allie thinking of?" I said,

gaily, “that she does not even deign to speak a word—”

“What was I thinking of?” she interrupted, turning her head towards me. “Let me see. I was wondering which would be the surest death. A year of the life I’m leading now, or a deadly poison, taken at once. To be sure it would be more proper to be killed by inches, but after all the other would be more merciful.”

“O, cousin, cousin,” I said, sadly, “so young and so—”

“Yes, worldly. I am that if you will. Being of the earth I am earthy. You are shocked and disgusted—you are a Puritan, cousin. I am not. Why should I be locked up in this dismal place, when women with half my good looks and talents are shining in the world as if indeed they were real stars. Yes, you may stare, cousin, at my avowing to know I am good-looking and clever. Not every woman would be so candid—no indeed!” she cried, with a cold, sneering laugh, “they will stare for hours in a looking-glass to admire themselves on the quiet; but when it comes that they are

praised for their beauty in public—good Lord ! the fuss they make would almost induce a fool to believe they never knew of it.”

“ You are hard on your sex, cousin,” I remarked, surprised at this exhibition of contempt.

“ On my sex ? ” she repeated, disdainfully, “ and on the other too. And except one, I vow I never knew a man worthy of a pure woman’s love—and on the other hand, I never knew a woman worthy of a sincere man’s devotion.”

“ Not one ? ” I asked, looking with all the love that was in my heart in my eyes—“ not one ? ”

“ Not one single one,” she repeated, emphatically, and returning my look half pityingly I thought.

“ Your logic is strange,” said I at length, with a quiet smile, “ but I will not argue with you—for with all my learning” (grimly) “ I do not understand it.”

“ That’s very possible,” she returned, with the shadow of a smile, “ since I do not pretend to understand it myself.”

“ That’s still more curious,” I remarked.

“ Do you always say things the purport of which you cannot comprehend ? ”

“ I do as others do, that which is done every day and by everybody. Do you think now that half our fine gentlemen when they pay compliments, understand the matter of their high-flown speeches ? Not a bit. They speak like fools — ”

“ And the receivers of the speeches ? ” I asked.

I believe I then thought myself very cutting.

“ Are fools too. But there, drop the subject, for as I live, here comes his most noble lordship, the Marquis of Sansgêne, on horseback. Hurra ! Hurry down, Harold ; I knew someone would turn up at last ! ”

As I descended to receive the visitor whom she saw from the window, miss hurried to the glass and arranged her beautiful hair as best became her.

What a spruce and well-clad gentleman he was, this Marquis of Sansgêne ! How fine his manners, speech, and ruffles. How delicately perfumed his laced cambric handkerchief. An artist must have blended the

colours of his dress. An angel must have made it fit. How everything upon his person became him. Even his years seemed not the least objectionable. A kind or species of man this person was, that I could never have pictured anything but as what he now stood before me. Not young and impetuous, not old and childish, but simply the “Marquis of Sansgêne” and nothing else. His long white blue-veined hands were covered with sparkling rings. In another, it would have appeared ostentatious and vulgar—in him, it was not. A snuff-box, a present given him by “the Pompadour,” he always carried in his hand. But he never snuffed. He was a fine gentleman in every sense of the word, and I vow I believe his sensibilities and heart were every inch as fine as the coat on his back.

So out I came to assist him from his horse (which he did not need, as he leaped from the saddle as nimbly as I could have done), out I came, I say, in the sunlight, and stood, a contrast by the Marquis in his silk and plush, and I in my old threadbare student dress. Allie leaned out of the window. Of course her

eyes noted the difference at once. What woman's, may I ask, would not? Ah, yes! I know of one—but she shall be nameless.

“Is Miss Marlande at home?” he asked, after the customary salutations had been passed through.

“Yes, she is half at home and half out,” I responded, pointing upwards where Almyra was half leaning out of the window to attract attention.

The Marquis smiled and kissed his hand. Ye gods! how his diamonds did glitter in the light.

“*Mademoiselle va-t-elle bien,*” he cried in French.

Almyra made a little move, and shrugged her shoulders.

He understood it as well as I. It was, “As well as I can be in such a place! What can you expect?”

Then Monsieur le Marquis entered the house, and was delighted with the antiquity of the place which he saw for the first time.

“You wonder, doubtless, how it is that I come—that is to say, how I found you out. Well, some time after the lamentable death

of Lady Norton I called at the Castle. But all had fled except the domestics. My lord of Alingdale, accompanied by his friend, Colonel Death, had gone to London. The Abbé Chatronière is by this time in Rome, and so I found no one to tell me your whereabouts; I did not even know where my lord was staying. But I left no stone unturned to find you, and to cut a long history short, here I am."

"'Tis a pity, M. le Marquis," said Almyra, with a meaning smile, "that you should trouble yourself so much for so little, for I can assure you of all the dismal wretched spots on earth, I think this the most dismal and wretched."

"Mademoiselle, I did not come to see the place, but the people," answered the old gallant, courteously.

He said people, but if ever anyone meant "you," he did certainly. Almyra was not so blind not to see it; a pleased look came to her face as she made a deep curtsey.

When he took his leave he asked permission to call again, which I granted with a heavy heart, though courteous tongue. O,

Almyra, O my love, you are going farther and farther from me now, I thought.

Soon after the nobleman's departure, Annie came home, her face beaming with health and spirits. When she heard of the Marquis's visit she turned pale, looking first at Almyra's delighted face, then at myself, and in a scared way burst into tears.

* * * *

I was by myself. Presently there came a soft knock at the door, and a slight, black-robed figure entered noiselessly, and taking a seat by my side, looked at me sorrowfully.

"Why, Annie," said I, "my dear girl, what is the matter? Are you unhappy?"

She laid her hand on my shoulder, and then, I am almost ashamed to write it, took my own unworthy hand in her own, and before I was aware, kissed it.

"O my dear brother," she cried, "O, best, kindest benefactor. I have pleaded for you, indeed very, very hard, but she is inexorable. I know you love her. I saw it long ago. This afternoon, when the Marquis came, I knew what it would be. I know how it grieves

you. I myself have felt the pangs of unrequited love. But what am I saying," she said hastily, blushing deeply. "O, my brother, she must not marry that old man. You do not know her. She does not love him, and it can only end in misery. Plead your cause, Hal," said this noble woman, "with your own tongue, my weak tearful words are not calculated to have any effect upon one so self-willed as Almyra."

One sentence in her speech struck me more forcibly than the rest. I took her hand in mine, and said —

"So you know, too, what the pains of unrequited love are? Dear Annie, confide in me your secret—even as you *know* mine—believe me I shall strive to be worthy of your trust?"

"Those words were uttered thoughtlessly —forget them I—I—was—" She never finished the sentence, but sunk on the ground with a low wailing cry.

Surprised and pained by what I saw and heard, I hastily raised her, but she averted her face, as I repeated my question again.

"I can't tell you, it's impossible," she

said, rising as if ashamed of the momentary weakness she had shown.

What was it that flashed so strangely across my mind? Heaven only knows what wild thought entered my brain. Could it be —was it possible that she entertained a more than sisterly regard for me. Tremblingly I asked —

“ Will I never know, Annie ? ”

“ Some day, perhaps, *my brother*, ” she answered, simply, not turning her pure eyes from me this time.

CHAPTER IV.

“ So you are the Butterfly ? ” said Almyra, turning to Sydney, who had returned from his travels, “ and do you remember when I was a little thing, how good you were to me — ”

“ And will be so still, if Mistress Marlande will permit,” he interposed.

“ Ah, yes, but then you used to carry me about, and — ”

“ And will do so still, if Miss Marlande will permit,” said the impudent young fellow with one of his merry laughs ; “ but pardon me, knowing you for such a long time, I feel quite ‘ patriarchially ’ inclined.”

“ Indeed ! ” returned the young lady with a smile, “ but I prefer to worship at a

distance, thank you; patriarchs do not usually descend to —”

“Condescend?” put in Sydney.

“Just so, to their devotees. There, you are far better where you are.” He was at the foot of a tree in the garden, Miss Allie perched on a stout branch above him. I think he wished to take a seat beside her.

“There, that’ll do, what bears one won’t two; what’ll hold me, won’t you!” she laughed.

“If I refuse to comply with your command and —”

“I’ll set Marky on to you,” she replied, promptly. Marc Antony, by-the-bye, was watching the scene gravely a little farther off. No sooner did he hear his mistress mention his name, when he rose, marched majestically towards Sydney, looked askance at the girl on the tree, and sniffed at the former’s leg suspiciously, as if he saw a bite in perspective.

Tired of watching from the window, tired of my own company and myself, I joined the two in the garden.

I do not believe this action of mine

pleased my kinswoman. Now some of the attention she had wholly occupied must be divided. Almyra liked *all*. She was so exacting in this respect, that I verily think that admiration, extended to neuter things, such as flowers, trees, the skies, moon, stars, or what you will, caused a thrill of something very akin to jealousy. Of women she had not the slightest fear. A rival might be beautiful —she herself would good-humouredly admire her. But envy? Pshaw! Almyra Marlande knew better than that. Had she not been told of her pre-eminence all her life? Yes, from a little child. She was not vain of it. No, to her it would have been as ridiculous as a man vain of his fortune and opulence. She knew the value of it though. “I have good looks and talents. The man I choose must be well-bred and rich. Exchange is no robbery.” This is, I am sure, what the mercenary woman thought. As Colonel Death said to me one day —

“But damme if I can help liking her for all her faults.”

So I felt, and so I loved her, despite her faults, like the wiser and better man.

"What do you intend doing, Sydney?" said I. "Are you going to stay here and become a hunting country gentleman, or fly about the world again like a restless spirit?"

"Upon my soul, I really don't know what I am going to do, and that's a fact. I hate the country and I abominate the town. I abhor travelling, and I detest keeping still. Now, Miss Almyra, can't you advise a fellow what to do, with plenty of time and money on his hands?" This was said curiously enough, more in earnest than in jest. "Marrying, now, would be something new —would you advise me to go in for it, eh?"

"Provided you get a suitable partner—and think that is the quickest method of taking leave to the joys of this world, yes. Considering marriage a better penitence than any other for past sins, I should advise you strongly to be an advocate for the holy institution. I think, now, for my own part, that a married man or woman has more chance of obtaining mercy in heaven than any bachelor or spinster, be they ever so good. But if, on the contrary, you act under no such virtuous impulse, but wish to

be married to find peace and joy, I should advise you to keep just as you are—but there, I'll say no more. Cousin Harold is ashamed of me for daring to say what I think. But you're such an old friend that I really couldn't help giving you a bit of substantial advice. So I shall neither ask for grace nor pardon."

"From experience do you speak," said Sydney, considerably amused, "about marriage?"

"I thank Heaven, on my knees, I *do not*," returned Allie, with a charming expression of mock devotion, folding her hands and gazing upwards.

What could one say to speeches like these? Blame the speaker? Well, some anchoritical monk might—but not I. Pretty sounds though they sometimes speak a little wickedly, pretty lips that utter them, are not so very easy to contemn. I should advise anyone to try who does not know. I should like also to be informed with what result.

If Sydney, Viscount Stapleton, was Allie's abject slave in boyhood, Sydney, Viscount Stapleton, was Miss Marlande's most devoted

and sincere admirer in manhood. He became her very shadow. No clambering up trees for bird's-nests now, no diving into streams for water lilies. *That* was past. The imperturbable, good-humoured fellow, ready to jest and laugh a little while before, in *her* company was silent—impatient when others spoke, attentive beyond all words when she but opened her lips. There are some natures like his, and till love takes possession of their souls, are gay, free and reckless. But when the mighty conqueror *does* come, O, what a change takes place! Out of place in society, even venturing to look down upon it (unless, of course, it is the loved object itself), they roam about like monomaniacs, possessed by one idea—that they love like none have loved before, and that the beloved is the most beautiful and divine creature on earth.

This love, I think, is the most teasing while it lasts, and the most short-lived and ephemeral to boot. At the termination of about a couple of years' (at the longest) ardent devotion, the dreamer gradually awakes. Yes. Dorinda's mouth is de-

cidedly large, her complexion is not fresh—and then she is so stupid, so “langweilig” as the Germans aptly express it. How could a man be bound to a creature like this? The great art is not to win, that’s easy enough, but to keep what is won. Here the whole secret lies. One need not be divinely beautiful, or extraordinarily clever to do this; but one must have *tact*—diplomacy in man, tact in woman—a little hypocrisy and a vast amount of Christian forbearance.

So, as I said before, Sydney was very much in love with my fair kinswoman, who, having no other person of greater importance at hand, allowed him good-humouredly to sigh, as it were at her feet. She went further than this, and even encouraged the poor young fellow in his advances until I verily believe he almost thought himself loved in return.

Mamma Stapleton got wind of this somehow, and didn’t approve of her son’s proceedings. “Told me,” cried Syd., in a burst of confidence and anger, “that Allie was fooling me, like she has so many others—hang’d if she didn’t, and that she was mad.

on my Lord Alingdale—Lord Alingdale, that—(never mind what.) Fancy, Hal—O, those women! There's my mother even jealous," groaned the young man.

I shrugged my shoulders and pitied him from my heart; but what could I tell the infatuated creature? That his mother was right? Certainly not. There is nothing more thankless in this world than the task of enlightening a lover to the frailties of the beloved object. And I advise anyone who meditates such a philanthropical act to pause—and change his mind.

CHAPTER V.

THE summer had almost gone ; yellow-robed autumn had already commenced to show earth her sway. Leaves and blossoms had begun to fall and to strew the ground with the shadows of beauties that had been.

It was late one afternoon, as we all sat together over a dish of tea, when Batty entered and announced two gentlemen.

“ What names ? ” I asked.

The question was useless, inasmuch as the well-known owners of them entered—my Lord Alingdale and Colonel Death. I looked round hastily. Almyra had risen, trembling, I saw, with excitement and pleasure. The unexpected surprise had lent, if possible, a

new beauty to her eyes and cheeks. Yes, never had my fair kinswoman appeared in a loveliness so wonderful and inexplicable.

We cordially welcomed our visitors, who in their turn seemed no less rejoiced to see us than we them.

My lord, who was in deep mourning, drew a chair close to Allie, and Colonel Death seated himself between Annie and myself.

“Why,” said the dear old Colonel, in his honest way, “this is like old times come back again! And how well and gay you all look! By George! it does a fellow’s heart good to see how happy people can be in this quiet, hum-drum neighbourhood.”

Miss Allie tossed her head. My lord was gazing intently at her.

“And I suppose now,” pursued the Colonel, banteringly, “that you are all very good and proper here. No card playing, no gambling, no fights, no plays. But plenty of fresh air, hymn-books, psalm singing, and go-to-bed early, and —”

“Get-up-late,” interrupted Almyra, smiling.

“Get-up-early,” corrected the Colonel.

“Business, eh? And you all *look* the better for it.”

“Appearances are delusive then,” cried Miss Marlande, rebelliously.

“How so?” asked my lord, with interest.

“O, I am simply speaking of myself,” she answered, speaking to him and looking at the soldier. “Colonel George says we all look the better; that may well be, but I for one do not *feel* the better for this monotonous existence.”

“Monotonous!” echoed Lord Alingdale, with a shrug of his shoulders and a sneer. “How’s that? Haven’t you your poor to visit, your household duties to accomplish, your tea-drinking with the clergyman’s better or worse half—haven’t you, in brief, and last, though not least, Hal’s *socks to darn* by the chimney corner? O, for the blessedness, the simplicity of heart to enjoy such a life,” said the nobleman, grimly.

“To begin with, your lordship,” said Miss Marlande, rising with a heightened colour, making a deep curtsey, “I must thank you for the pretty speech about the blessedness and simplicity of heart, etc., which you

ascribe to me. In the second place, I should blush, knowing how little I deserve your praise, as I don't visit the poor nor the clergyman's wife, and as for Hal's socks and the chimney corner—well—I'll say no more but that the poor fellow's things would be in tatters but for our Saint yonder." She laughed and pointed to Annie.

"O, Allie!"—began her sister.

"Yes, you know you do everything—you sweet, dear girl, you. What we would do without you, goodness only knows, I don't."

"Pray don't say such dreadful things, Miss Marlande," cried my lord.

"I cannot help it; ugly things will obtrude themselves sometimes in one's mind."

"Yes—but diplomacy teaches us not to say all we think."

"We had an argument on the subject before, I believe. I'm not very diplomatic, then, according to your theory, because I mostly say what I think," remarked the young lady, coolly.

My guests having accepted a pressing invitation to stay at Steyneville, as we could well accommodate them, sent to the inn for

their luggage, on which errand Birch volunteered to go with no great alacrity.

“Master Harold,” said the good soul, looking at me strangely, before he went, and as I gave him the necessary instructions, “doan’t ye think now that one of the gen’l’men would be better off at the ‘Three Crows,’ (the inn) “than here?”

“Why, there is sufficient room for both,” I answered, surprisedly.

“Very good, Master Harold,” answered Birch, with his usual abruptness, “only the Lord deliver us from all temptation—that’s all. I’ll be back in a minute, sir.”

Curious speech that, and one I could not refrain from laughing over at the time. I did not understand the purport of it then; I do now. No harm came of it. And so what matters it that the trusty servant was more clear-sighted than his master. Of course, when Birch spoke of one of the gentlemen, he meant my Lord Halifax—and the temptation—Almyra.”

* * * *

“Look’ee here, my boy,” said Colonel Death to me, confidentially, one day—my

Lord Alingdale and my two cousins were gone out for a ramble in the woods—"look'ee here, do you know why we're staying at Steynevile, Alingdale and me—eh?"

I humbly answered that, as we were old friends, and doubtless impelled by that sweet sentiment, friendship, my benefactor and the Colonel honoured me and my house by their presence.

"Humph! Well, yes" (with a shrug). "Friendship's all very fine—but, come, don't you think now that there's something more than that which induces a gad-about like Alingdale to come here—which, to say the least, is far from gay? I'll give you plenty of time—in no hurry, Hal." And he puffed a great cloud of smoke in the air, and watched it slowly melt.

"Perhaps my lord wishes for quiet," I returned, rather grimly.

"Come, come, *you* know better than that!" expostulated the other. "A man who has for thirty odd years—I may say since his babyhood—plunged in all sorts of gaieties and excesses, won't suddenly take to sitting by a quiet chimney corner, my lad—mark

that—without some good strong reason for doing so."

"Perhaps he has grown tired—"

"Tired! Bah!" exclaimed the Colonel, impatiently knocking the ashes from his pipe. "Living a life like he has is like opium-smoking—you can't leave it off, though it is killing—not by inches, but by yards. Think only what he did last week. Dead ill in bed, some half-dozen fellows come to visit him. Cards and drink followed of course. At eleven o'clock, coming into his bedroom I find him *up* and *dressed*. 'Where the d—l are you going,' said I, 'in that state? Are you mad?' 'No more so than you,' he replies, coolly, with that sneer of his, 'I'm going to the play.' 'I swear you shan't go out like you are,' I replied. 'And I swear I shall,' says he. 'Gentlemen,' I said, turning to the fellows, 'he is dangerously ill; to let him go out would be madness. Let us put him to bed forcibly.'"

"And did you?"

"Did we! Devil a bit! For he stood up—he that two hours ago had been trembling and ill with fever and ague—got up, I say,"

cried the Colonel, working himself up, “and walked as straight across the room as you or I would, and said, planting his back against the wall, ‘If either of you care to venture’—But what does it matter? He looked not only as if he could have knocked *one* of the staring whipper-snappers down, but the whole set of ‘em, by gad he did,” said the Colonel, vehemently; “and that’s not all either, for when he walks in from the play, he comes straight up to me and takes me by the hand, saying he’s sorry if he hurt my feelings, that he knew I only meant it kindly, and—I’m dashed if he didn’t beg my pardon.” He turned his head aside, this brave, bluff veteran, and a tear rolled down his grey moustachios. O, precious diamond, dug from the mines of Pity! Such drops are too costly to be set in a crown; they are gathered by an unseen hand, and sparkle where earthly gems are dull!

“But to return to where I left off,” continued the Colonel, labouring under the delusion that I had not seen the tear, “Alingdale has come for one purpose.”

“And that is?” I asked as he paused.

“To make love to Miss Allie!” he answered, looking at me fixedly.

“And you helped him, Colonel Death, knowing him?” I asked, sadly and reproachfully.

“I helped him, my boy, because I feel convinced he loves her; because I know he means it, for once in his life, seriously.”

No hope now—no hope, no hope, everything seemed to say. The twilight was falling; the sun that had but a few minutes before cast a warm light over the earth’s surface was gone, and with it there seemed to have fled the last hope in my heart. It was a bitter struggle, and Heaven only knows what bitter pangs were passing through my mind at the time. My face was no mask to my heart’s meditations, for the Colonel saw it at once. Placing his broad, strong hand on my shoulder, gently as a woman, and like he had done once before in my childhood, he said softly—

“God’s will be done, my boy.”

Ay, His will was done, and in after years I blessed and thanked the will that had been so beneficial for my welfare.



This I copy from Almyra's journal. It shows more than I could the workings of a proud and wilful woman's heart.

"Oct. 29th.—As I turn back the leaves of my journal, I find that I have marked down three men that have loved me sufficiently to ask me in marriage. Let me see. Before I counted the two brothers Chapman, the Marquis de Sansgêne, and my cousin. To this list I think I am justified in adding my former playfellow, Sydney, Viscount Stapleton. O, that I could add my Lord of Alingdale. He admires me, I know. But there, he admires every pretty face ; that makes me angry ; he thinks he can do with me as he likes. He is mistaken. I shall show it him too. I am always making this resolution in private, but somehow or other, when he is *near*, it seems impossible for me to be indifferent to him. Ah, me ! I am not weak—but I scarcely dare confess it to myself, to breathe or to whisper it—is it, can it be that I *love* him ? That man ! I tremble as I write it. It is perdition and ruin to think of it even ! Yet he seems in earnest when he speaks to me. Phsaw ! that is the very

wile, that pretence of sincerity, that has been the sorrow and ru— I will think no more of it. At least, I will try, even though my heart break—*my heart break!* He shall never see me relent towards him either by word or deed.—ALMYRA.

“ Oct. 30th.—Let me see which sounds best. The Marquise de Sansgêne, Almyra, Viscountess Stapleton, Mrs. Steyneville, or —my Lady Alingdale. I should not have written that last, but to-day he was so wonderfully in earnest to me. So earnest, indeed, that I almost believed—almost, but not quite. I have the satisfaction of never once having encouraged him. I was as cold and hard as that dear old Colonel George says I only can be. But he was not repulsed; no, my very insolence seemed to add fuel to the fire. A fine fire, surely!

“ As Mrs. Steyneville ! O, Almyra, if you only could settle down to be the good wife and helpmeet of a true and noble man. But I cannot, although I am sure it would be better if I could. I do not even understand myself. Knowing the sham and tinsel pomp of the people with whom I have been accus-

tomed to live (all except my dear, dead friend and benefactress), I wonder how I can tolerate the thought of mixing up with them again, after the purity of a quiet country life. Bah ! I am heartily sick of everything here. O, the eternal ever-recurring stupidity and monotony of the life I lead now. Yes, I shall do anything for a change. Ainsi va le monde. Who shall it be, the Marquis, the Viscount, or both ?

“ November 3rd.—Sydney called. Very gloomy and vexed, like the weather. My lord the cause. My lord cheerful and lightly sarcastic. What a contrast ! O, how I wish—Almyra Marlande, thou art a fool. One man is as good as another. It is best not to offend the Viscount, as he is in earnest, and the other is not. Sydney, when he comes again, shall have no cause to complain of my want of courtesy. I warrant that.”

CHAPTER VI.

SYDNEY never came, though, for a long time after, and my lord had the field to himself. It was curious to note the varying moods of the ambitious woman when in his presence. Frank and gay, insolent and scornful by turns, neither the nobleman nor I knew what to make of it. At twilight she would usually sit by the window looking through the glass on the dismal dark scene stretched beneath. Curiously enough, too, she preferred the light of the moon to the artificial flicker of candles ; and so whilst Annie, the Colonel, and I were cosily seated round the blazing fire, Almyra sat at the farther end of the room, and, as I have said before, by the window, with the cold light of the moon shining on her head

and face, making her appear like some transcendantly beautiful and pallid statue.

Did she sit alone? Well, not exactly, because my lord always, by a strange, not to say extraordinary, coincidence, happened to harbour a liking for the very same places. She gave him no encouragement. When he spoke she returned him hard monosyllabic answers, or laughed and rattled into a madly lively talk that was as perplexing as the other. Her conduct made not the slightest difference; *he*, at least, was always the same, exasperatingly so. Her scorn he treated with good humour—as if she had been a little girl—her insolence and anger with mock respect; but her gaiety!—*that* was more than even he knew how to deal with!

To-night she was as cold as the light which fell from the heavens on her shrine, and quite as distant.

“Miss Allie,” remarked my lord at length, laughingly, “I can make nothing of you to-night!”

This was said in a low tone, but not low enough to escape *me*.

"Nay indeed, nor any other night, my lord. I am not particularly pliable," says Galatea, coming to life with a very woman-like toss of the head.

"Yes; but to-night you are particularly unbending. Have I said or done anything to offend you?" he asked, leaning over her.

"You! How can your words or deeds offend *me*, my lord?" she returned, with bitter emphasis.

"Am I so perfectly indifferent to you," he said, gently. "O, how wonderfully gentle his tones could be! "I who have nursed, yes, and loved, you from a child. Well," he said, with a shrug and a low laugh that was not agreeable, "what could *I* expect? I am certainly not the kind of being any pure creature could have any regard for. Miss Marlande, you show your good sense vastly well," he said, abruptly.

"My lord cares hugely for anyone's regard," remarked miss, quickly, biting her lips. "Loved me from a child! O, what a pretty speech to make! I wonder to how many ladies you have said *that* to in your life, and what answers they may have

given—ay, I wonder,” she added, with sublime nonchalance.

He shrugged his shoulders. Presently the lights were brought in, and, the curtains being drawn, the Colonel, Annie, and I sate down to a game of cards.

“Cousin, will you join?” I asked the figure by the window.

“No.”

She turned a face as pale as death towards me. And so she loved and misunderstood her dead benefactress’s kinsman.

“What shall we play for?” asked Annie, shuffling the cards.

“For—love,” answered the Colonel with a covert glance at the couple near the window.

The game commenced—the game I say now, but it was a fearful labour at the time. She was at the back of me, listening to the half-whispered words of my—*rival* I was about to write. But that he was not. Ingratitude was never one of my vices, and he that had been a kind and generous benefactor and friend to me in my boyhood could not be so called, even though he was taking the object dearer to me than life itself from beneath my very eyes. Besides this, he did

not know the truth. Even Death and Annie were beginning to believe I had already stifled my love in its infancy, so well did I conceal it now.

“Come, Allie dearie, why won’t you join us?” asked Annie, glancing up from her cards, suspecting nothing. “Hearts, Colonel George, not diamonds.

“Ay,” said the Colonel, winking at me, treating the unconsciousness of my kinswoman as an exquisite joke, “come along, missie, and you too, Alingdale. Hearts then—I make a trick.”

“Thank you, Colonel George, but I am dull enough without cards,” returned Almyra.

“No great praise, then, for your gallant there, by Jove,” laughed the Colonel. “My knave wins, Miss Annie!”

“Nay, indeed, I did not mean that; but I am tired of this Steynevile,” said the lady near the window. “Gaiety itself could never turn the ugly old house to any account. O, how I regret Norton Castle and the merry times we had there. I’ll never be reconciled to this place. Who but the two saints yonder could be?” she said, turning from real petulance into a laugh, as if in spite of herself.

"Do not be reconciled ; change it," cried the nobleman.

"Won!" cries the Colonel exultantly, throwing down his last card.

"'Tis easily said," answered Miss Marlande, the younger, somewhat peevishly and quite innocently, "but how?"

"Lost;" returns Annie with a quiet smile, "I trump it."

"You say you regret Norton; come back to it. You say you regret the gaieties you enjoyed in my poor kinswoman's lifetime; come back to them," cried he, with more animation than I had ever seen him display, the usually cold face and bearing becoming doubly handsome with the unwonted energy he put into his words.

"What, as my lord's obedient, humble servant?" asked Almyra, with a sweeping curtsey and a haughty smile, thinking, doubtless, he was laughing at her.

"Heydey! What's this?" ejaculates the Colonel, starting up.

"No," said the other, with a low bow, in which act his long dark hair partially concealed his face; "no, as my honoured *wife!*"

CHAPTER VII.

EVERY card was dropped, and all eyes involuntarily turned towards the chief actors of the scene. Annie, with her hand raised to her bosom, stood as one turned to stone, and with her eyes rivetted in an almost shrinking fascination on her sister and suitor. The Colonel, with an approving smile and folded arms, seemed to enjoy the whole amazingly.

We all waited in breathless silence for her answer, which was not long in coming.

Self-possessed and stately, even in that most trying moment. Yes, Almyra had learned much from her kind benefactress. She bent again, and her lips moved, but

that was all, for no sound issued from them.

My lord, with a movement of surprise, said —

“Do you wish me to repeat the request, Allie?”

“For God’s sake speak, Almyra!” cried Annie, tearfully, running to her sister and catching her in a close embrace.

But the other, gently putting her aside, answered —

“You do not even give me time to think over my lord’s *kind* proposal.”

“Kind!” exclaimed the nobleman, looking from one to the other. “Kind!”

“Yes, kind, my lord of Alingdale, and generous,” said the strange woman, firmly; “but you must not think me so blind as not to see through the reason of your asking me to be your *wife*. Ah, my lord, you have ever been kindly and good to us, and now, to crown all, you would sacrifice yourself to restore me to the gaieties and pleasures that I love; yes, love, and I am not ashamed to own it. But my desires shall not be bought at the price of *Pity*—no, no—and I can but

regret that you thought so poorly, so poorly of me, my lord, to think that but for a moment I would accept your offer."

"Pity, Miss Marlande?"

"Not a word," she cried, with an imperious gesture. "I cannot hear nor believe one word to the contrary, though I shall be grateful, ever grateful, to you for your goodness."

"Almyra," he said, "I have loved you—I swear it—from a child."

"And love me still—like one," she returned, sadly, "and hold me like one, too. You have not changed—I have. Do you remember when, as a little girl, I first saw you, and, struck by the costliness and pattern of your *ruffles*, asked for one? That was a small matter, and was child-like; yet you tore it from your wrist and gave it me. That was generous—to satisfy, by spoiling a whole dress, the whim of a child. And now, my lord, I am older and changed. If my fancy was cruel enough then to permit me to allow you to spoil your whole dress, my heart is not cruel

enough now to permit you, by satisfying another whim, to spoil your whole life."

"Spoil my life! No, what little there remains of it you will make," he cried, almost passionately. "Again I ask you, share it!"

"Hush, my lord," she pursued, steadily, with her whole wayward heart loving and disbelieving him. "Think what a helpmate I would be to mend your life—to make it! As you say, I"—she laughed bitterly—"no, no, that can never be, though I must kiss the hand that belongs to such a heart, one that is capable of making such a divine sacrifice, and for pity's sake."

And she kneeled down with her beautiful head bent, and ere he could withdraw it, had softly pressed his hand to her lips.

He raised her hastily. We remained looking on in a sort of helpless stupefaction. Her face was pale as death itself, but the hand and form were firm, and no movement of the muscles showed the bitterness and cruelty of her suffering.

He raised her, I said, tenderly, but she shrank from his touch, and a deep blush overspread her immobile features.

With that strange smile of bitterness he remarked the movement, and misinterpreted it. The hand that was extended in anxious solicitude over the once bent form fell listlessly to his side again. The indolent face, awakened into momentary enthusiasm, resumed its expression of scornful indifference which she might have dispelled for ever.

“ You are right,” he said at last, “ quite right ; and I”—he paused for an instant, and added in his old heedless manner, “ am quite wrong.”

“ Now look here, Alingdale, for Heaven’s sake,” broke in the Colonel excitedly, seizing hold of his friend’s arm. “ You don’t mean it, now ; I know for a fact you don’t. I’ll swear you don’t. Do you think to deceive me by speaking in that strain. For your own sake, man,” he added, in a lower tone, “ be in earnest for once in your life, *and speak as if you were.*”

Almyra’s quick ears caught these last few words.

“ Ay,” she cried, stung to the quick and misinterpreting in her turn, “ ay, my lord, even though you are not in earnest, speak as

though you were. Women are so easily deceived, as no doubt you know by experience. What, Colonel, have you been so long in his lordship's company as to catch the infection of deceit at last, and help him in it, too? O, for shame, for shame! I thought you knew and loved me better, sir."

Her proud indignation was astonishingly real; the quivering lip and humid eye, moistened by the tears of passionate regret at believing herself, where she loved, the object of pity, was no feint or pretence. She stood before us in a new light, that of a proud, loving, wilful woman hurt and mortified.

Annie had left the room, and the Colonel, very much perplexed and grieved at my cousin's treatment of him, turned and implored me to intercede. He hurried across the room and whispered a few words in my ear to the following effect—

"You know what I told you the other night. I swear to God it's true. He loves her; tell her so."

This was easier said than done. Loving her dearly myself, to endeavour to convince

her of another man's love was a hard trial, and a bitter one, but I did it. I am thankful at this distance of time to say that I did it.

When I had told her what the honest soldier had begged of me to tell, and even added a little persuasive eloquence of my own, she turned angrily upon me.

"So, kinsman, this is your pride—to ask me to accept my lord's proposal, which only his *pity* and *generosity* prompts him to make?" she asked.

"Almyra," I answered gently, "'tis neither pity nor generosity, but love—"

"What you! are you, too, trying to deceive me?" cried the perverse and beautiful creature, brokenly. "Is there not one of you to take my part—*three men*, and gentlemen, against one woman. O, on my word, sirs," cried she contemptuously, triumphing over her momentary emotion, "you show your valour prodigiously well. 'Tis a wonder only that you do not use your swords; I see, Colonel, that you have your hand on yours already in case of emergency."

"Damn the sword!" cried the Colonel, in a frenzy, unsheathing his weapon and snap-

ping it in mad fury across his knee and throwing the pieces on the floor. "There, Miss Allie, if this is any satisfaction to you, enjoy it," holding up his right hand, which was bleeding profusely from a severe cut. "As for your affair, Alingdale, manage it for yourself, for the devil take me if ever I interfere again," and he bounced in great wrath from the room, closely followed by myself.

It was the first time I had ever seen the kindly gentleman give way to violent passion, and the last. When his self-inflicted wound had been bandaged by the skilful and sympathising Batty, he turned laughingly to me and said —

"On my word now, Hal, I never knew till this moment what a demon I could be, but it serves me right, perfectly right, and I'm heartily glad of it—ay, sincerely glad," he added, noticing my look of disbelief. "So—but what have you done—left the two together? Faith! now that's not clever; we'll have Miss Allie challenging Alingdale to mortal combat, and—but it's no use," he groaned, sinking down on a chair, unable to keep his feigned gaiety up any longer, "I wish

I hadn't meddled, because after all, you know, it was a devilish hard thing, as she said, for three of us to be against her."

"But we were not," I reasoned, "we were only trying to make her understand—"

"Understand—a woman—and a beautiful one. O, Hal! Hal! do you know so little of the world as that? Why, it was that very attempt of reasoning with her that made the affair more hopeless than ever."

"Ah, quite right," I assented, somewhat bitterly. "Mr. Pope, I think, is the only person who knew a 'reasonable woman' since—"

"Humph, yes," interrupted the Colonel, glancing at me and humming —

"I know a thing that's most uncommon,
Envy be silent and attend—
I know a *reasonable woman*,
Handsome, yet witty and a friend.

What Pope knows it is very evident we *do not*, and the best would be for us to —"

"To—?" I hazarded, as he paused.

"Make the best of a bad job," replied the brave old fellow, desperately.

I beat a devil's tattoo on the floor with my feet, and drummed with my fingers impatiently on the table, and bit my lips viciously.

The Colonel snuffed and sneezed prodigiously. We both anxiously awaited for the result of the *tête-à-tête*. Presently the door opened and we jumped up simultaneously, for our ears caught the rustle of a dress. But it was only Annie, who stole in quietly and took a seat in the corner of the room. Neither of us spoke a word. About a quarter of an hour elapsed in silence when the door moved again, and Almyra herself stood upon the threshold.

I said before that the Colonel's wound had been bandaged, but being a pretty severe one the blood had by this time managed to saturate the white linen, and though not of a really serious nature it looked, externally, at all events bad enough.

Miss Allie glanced rapidly from one to another, at last her eyes rested in undisguised horror on the Colonel's hand. Without another minute's hesitation she ran towards him, and throwing her arms about him, as she did when she had been a little child and had done something to offend him, called him her "dear, dear Colonel George," and blamed herself for doing anything to cause him pain.

"Are you hurt very much—and all through me. O, I am so sorry! Are you dreadfully angry with me—very, very, very angry?" she cried, accentuating each word. "Indeed I shall never pardon myself," and so on.

"But I will," said the dear gentleman, taking her hand and placing it reverently to his lips.

And what fascination was there in this Almyra Marlande that all her iniquities should be so quickly forgotten and forgiven?

"Do you know what I did?" pursued the siren. "When I was alone I picked up a piece of your sword and said to myself, 'Now I shall give myself a wound like my dearest Colonel George gave himself as a punishment,' but when I caught hold of it, the piece of sword you know, it looked so sharp and bright, so cruelly sharp and bright, that I looked at it and—are you listening?"

Yes, we were all listening.

"Well, then, I *dropped* it and ran away, and here I am."

"And Alingdale?" asked the other, eagerly. "What have you done with him?"

"My lord—" said my cousin, flushing.

"*My lord,*" reiterated his friend, sadly; "that begins coldly enough—yes?"

"My cousin's protector, then, if you like that title better; *our benefactor*—the would-be-sacrificed-on-the-altar-of-generosity—has had his answer," returned the young lady, with a smile on her lips—Heaven alone knows with what woe and anguish in her heart.

"Yes, yes, and where is he? and what was your answer?" demanded the Colonel, breathlessly.

"He has left Steyneville, and my answer was what you heard it to be," she said, quite firmly.

* * * * *

A few days after my lord's abrupt departure I received the following note:—

"DEAR HAL,

"Finding at a late hour I sorely needed a change of air, I decamped to London. The change was decidedly for the worse. I know you have pardoned me for going without bidding the proper adieux; but you know I stayed with you on the condition that I should come and go like the wind, without disturbing anyone.

"Taking advantage of my freedom, I fled,

and am anxious to fly again. That's to say I am about to start for some out-of-the-way place soon. I haven't the faintest notion where though, as yet—”

“Perhaps,” cries Miss Marlande, scornfully, interrupting me in the perusal of the letter aloud at the breakfast table—“perhaps he wishes to see Miss Mædelon, or Madelone (which was it?) again! ”

“Perhaps,” says the Colonel, gravely, “he does, and, perhaps, if he obtains his wish, the young lady will not be so cruel and —”

Almyra looked up hastily ; a retort was on her lips, but the sight of the wounded hand prevented her. She repressed something rising in her throat, and—

“You are his friend, Colonel,” she said at length.

“Hush!” cried Annie, piling the Colonel's plate, as he looked another way. “Let Harold continue. Can't you two people see he's waiting?” she added, laughingly.

So I continued —

“At all events, I think I shall be gone for some considerable time, during which period you would be conferring on me a great favour by using Norton Castle and all be-

longing to it as your home. Pray give Miss Allie my best respects, and tell her I am truly sorry for being the cause of any distress and anger. To Annie give my best regards and adieux ; she at least has had no cause to take umbrage at anything I have said or done ; lastly, my regards to yourself, my dear fellow, for whom I have a strange and unaccountable *love*.

“ ALINGDALE.”

I do not know how, but some water found its way to my eyes, and would have fallen, but that I wiped them quietly and unobservedly away.

“ Poor Alingdale,” remarked the Colonel, shaking his head sorrowfully.

“ Poor Lord Alingdale,” repeated Almyra, rising, with a laugh that some of us might have believed real. “ Poor Aling—”

But the word was never finished. The mocking smile was still on her lips as she spoke ; but Nature triumphed here over the stubborn pride of this woman, and for the first time in her twenty years of life she tottered, and, with a low moan, fell fainting in the outstretched arms of the watchful Colonel.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MONTH after the foregoing occurrence, and about three weeks subsequent to the departure of Colonel Death to see my lord off, I was returning late home one evening, when I chanced to stumble upon—of all people in the world—Stapleton.

“Faith!” said I, “Sydney, you’ve been a stranger lately,” having first gone through the customary salutations. “How’s that? and—what! have you been wounded?”

I noticed with surprise that his right arm was bandaged and in a sling.

“Yes,” he returned, evasively. “I went to London for a while, and —”

“Got hurt there?” I asked, compassionately. “Tell me, my dear fellow, how? I don’t mind telling you I have felt anxious about you —”

"Anxious! Ah, that's like our dear old Saint of Oxford. Now don't preach, Hal, for I got this," he said, gaily pointing to his wounded arm, "in a duel."

"You!" I asked, surprised. "And who was the gentleman, and what the cause? Ah!" I said, shaking my finger at him, "a lady's in the case, I warrant!"

He shrugged his shoulders, and, turning his head aside, asked in a subdued voice of Almyra.

A sudden light broke on me.

"Stay!" I cried. "Now I know it was indirectly through *her* that you received this. Tell me, was it not?"

"Through her—O God!" replied the poor young fellow, pressing his uninjured hand to his side. "I don't complain of the wound. If only my heart hurt me as little, I wouldn't mind."

"Hush, hush, Sydney," I said, moved with the anguish of the young man's tones. "How did it all come about?"

"I'm a fool," he answered, pressing my hand in his. "There, I'll tell you all you require to know. With whom did I fight? I answer with a great friend of yours. If you

ask me his name, I tell you, Lord Halifax Alingdale."

"My lord!" I repeated in amazement.

"Yes, '*my* lord,'" he returned, with bitter emphasis. "We were together at White's about three weeks ago; each of us were called upon to give a toast. When it came to my turn, like a cursed jackanapes, I pulled out the lock of hair Miss Marlande gave me, and said—'I drank to the owner of it.' No sooner did that devil of an Alingdale see the hair, than he gave one of his sneering laughs, and when it came to his turn to propose a toast, drew from his breast another lock, exactly like mine, and, what's more, laid it parallel to mine. What with his laugh and the wine, I must confess I was rather mad; so I started up in a fury, and asked him where he got it from.

"With his cool stare, he said —

"Do you really suppose, now, that I'm going to make the lady's name the subject for a drunken brawl!"

"Drunken! I'm damned if I stand that," I shouted. "No more drunk than you, my lord."

"He never answered, but looked at the

grinning fellows at the table, with a pitying smile.

“ This incensed me even more.

“ ‘ You called me drunk, just now, my lord —here’s something to prove your words ! ’ and I sent a glass of claret over him. He started up as pale as death, with the red stain on his front, and dripping on to his light waistcoat.

“ ‘ You pup ! ’ he said, ‘ move away there ! ’

“ And what do you think he did to show what a clever shot he was ? He cocked his pistol, and sent a bullet whizzing through the top of a small decanter about thirty yards off.

“ ‘ Damme, swords then ! ’ said I, ‘ and to the death,’ maddened by the way he spoke and took the insult.

“ ‘ So be it,’ he answered.

“ Behind Montague House a spot was soon selected, and seconds obtained. I gave him a slight wound first, in the leg ; but presently he got the upper hand, and, giving me a bad thrust in the arm, made me drop my sword. Instead of finishing me up—curse him—I hate him more for it—he sheathed

his sword, and assisted one of the fellows in bandaging my wound.

“‘My lord,’ I said, as soon as I could speak, for the loss of blood had made me faint, ‘I’m not grateful for the mercy you have shown. In your place, I would have driven the sword home, and I expect to receive no more compassion than I show.’

“‘That’s bad, my young friend,’ always with his demon’s sneer. ‘The Bible teaches you to return a blow with a kiss. I have acted —’

“‘You are a confirmed Atheist,’ I answered. ‘What do you know of the Bible !’

“‘You young fool; Love is my Bible. My love has taught me to be merciful. If I had not this near my heart’ (he dragged out the lock of hair again), ‘you wouldn’t be in the land of the living.’

“And he left, and—here I am.”

The story as told by himself did not exhibit him in the best light, and certainly presented my lord to the greatest possible advantage. We spoke amicably together for some time, and I informed him to his undis-

guised joy of my lord's proposal and my kinswoman's final response.

" You have no objection to my telling Allie of your rencontre with my lord, for I know she has been wondering at your prolonged absence ? " said I, at parting.

" Tell her by all means," answers Syd, with a confident and full heart. " Good-night, and God bless you, Hal. I'll see ye to-morrow ! "

To-morrow came, and with it Sydney. I had already told Almyra of his adventure, agreeably to his wish, and, strange to relate, she took it in a very different fashion to what I wished her. She was curiously nervous and agitated when I spoke of the duel, and did not even give me time to tell her the result, ere she broke out with —

" O, Harold, *he—he* was not wounded or hurt, was he ? "

Thinking she alluded to Sydney, I replied —

" Yes, and badly."

Never shall I forget the expression of anguish on her face that mutely told me the fearful suffering her proud heart underwent.

" But he is coming to-day," I pursued.

" He ! I thought he had gone away."

I stared.

"My lord went away some four weeks ago," she said.

"Faith, cousin," I replied, "I'm not speaking of my lord, but Sydney."

"Then his lordship is not wounded?" she cried, eagerly, laying her hand on the lappel of my coat-sleeve.

"Not he," I answered gaily, very uneasy at heart; "my lord is the best swordsman in England."

"He's not wounded!" cried Almyra, with fervour. "O, thank God for that!"

"You love him, cousin," I said, reproachfully, "and yet you sent him away!"

"Love him," she repeated, with a laugh of feigned gaiety, "of course I do, and so do you, and so does Annie. Would we not all be grieved to hear if our benefactor," she added, "was hurt?"

I shook my head, and, as she took up a book as if to read, I walked in the adjoining room, which was only separated from the one in which my kinswoman sate by thin curtains.

I was absorbed in my correspondence, when I heard a heavy step in the next apartment, and, looking up, saw Sydney standing with outstretched hand before Almyra.

CHAPTER IX.

“ YOUR right hand is in a sling, I see !” she said, coldly, “but I assure you, Viscount” (she had always called him Sydney heretofore) “unless anyone can offer me the right hand, I never take the other.”

The poor fellow, who had looked forward to a very different reception, stared blankly at her for a minute, and said —

“ But, Miss Allie, the other one is badly hurt.”

“ I have told you,” she interrupted, mercilessly, “that I never take people’s left hands.”

It was his turn now for retaliation ; tearing off the bandages, which bound a very ugly, gaping wound, together with truly heroic, albeit, fiery fortitude, he proffered it.

I could scarcely repress an involuntary exclamation of pity at the sight, but, she, like a statue of marble, as relentless and unfeeling, looked at Sydney, and said —

“ I would hurt you if I took your hand ; pray cover it up. It is not an agreeable sight.”

“ Hurt me ! ” he repeated, stung beyond endurance by her unwomanly speech. “ Hurt me ! no, by God ! no, Miss Marlande. See, if you tore the wound open with both hands, it would not pain me one half as much as do your cruel words. I have offended you,” he said, pleadingly, as she turned away. “ Forgive me—on my knees I ask your pardon, though I do not know when and how I have incurred your anger ! ”

“ Get up, sir, pray ; I don’t want any man to kneel to me. The position is as absurd as it is ungraceful,” she remarked, with a contemptuous smile.

Certainly there is nothing like ridicule to bring a lover to the senses he has lost. He sprung up on his feet like lightning, a retort was on his lips—she wished it—but his love was too great and passionate to admit of this. He fell back a pace or two, and said as if to himself —

“ And this is the Almyra Marlande who loved me as a child, whom I adored and adore, and would lay down my life to serve. I cut my finger as a boy ; she cried to see it bleed, and pitied me. She has rent my heart and soul as a man, and laughs to see what she has done.”

In truth, she did laugh, strangely and un-musically.

“ How pretty, Viscount, that would sound made into a poem (done into verse). As Horatio says, you might have rhymed —

I cut my finger as a boy,
The sight did cause her pain—not joy ;
As a man I cut me once again,
The sight did cause her joy—not pain.

There, and though in not good metre and worse —”

“ Almyra,” I said, thinking it high time to come forward, “ how cruel you are. Tell him, for Heaven’s sake, you are only jesting. You have gone too far, much too far, already.”

Poor Sydney ! he was perfectly aghast at that woman’s callous indifference to his mental and physical suffering. Indeed, as she stood there in her wonderful beauty and cruelty, I felt half afraid of her myself—so

young and so inexorable, so pitiless and remorseless—half the love that I had for her thrilled out of me in a shudder of horror.

“Now, Viscount, you have an eloquent champion,” remarked Almyra, coolly. “Let’s hear Harold.”

“Cousin,” I said, quietly, “you have heard what Sydney said. He asks you how he has offended you. As a generous woman, tell him.”

O, the poor, poor fellow, standing in his riding gear, with his eyes fixed immovably on the only woman his butterfly-heart had ever cared for—immovably, and alas for him, hopefully. Time truly is a great changer of men and manners, but Love is a still more potent innovator ! To think this devoted, passionate creature was once the Butterfly—the heedless, giddy fickle Butterfly—once constant to nothing but Change. It was most wonderful to think of, still more so to see.

He told her humbly and brokenly of his affection. If she did not think him worthy of her love he would leave and not trouble her more. But she had helped to foster hopes in his heart not long before, would she shatter them completely now, or—on the threshold

of the word he stopped, and waited for her answer.

" You had a duel with my lord of Alingdale ? " she said, abruptly.

" Yes," he answered her, wonderingly.

" Through me—and your fault ? " she continues, looking straight in front of her.

" P—partially," he stammers. " This is the result," pointing deprecatingly to his hastily-bandaged wound.

" That is the result," she repeats, half dreamily and softly. " Tell me ; he said had it not been for the lock of hair in his possession he would have killed you ? "

" He said so, d— him," returns the other, *sotto voce*.

" Do you know whose hair that was ? " she demands. " It was mine—I gave it him. He was merciful then for my sake ! For my sake ! " she cried, in a sort of rapture, " he spared his hand from slaying ! O, it was well and nobly done ! "

" You love *him* then," says Sydney, hoarsely, " that libertine ! O, Allie, Allie ! how could you ? " sobbed out the young man.

" As I told my cousin I tell you. We all owe so much to my lord that — "

"It's false—I don't believe one word. Look at her, Hal—she loves that villain—who would rather see her dead at his feet than offer his cursed hand to her honourably. Heart! by Heaven, he hasn't one!" shouted the Viscount, hotly. "Ask the ruined—"

"Hush, hush! my dear fellow! Is this generous of you?" I asked, sadly enough.

"Generous be d—d! O, Steyneville, it breaks my heart!" says Syd, brokenly. "All the time the arch devil was away, she—she—yes, though it seems a sneakish thing for a man to say—she led me on, and made me hope, loving her as I did. It's too much—by Heaven, it's too much!" and tears of disappointed love fairly started to his eyes, and he left her presence with a great sob, that made my heart bleed with pity for him.

CHAPTER X.

FROM MY DIARY.

"Let diaries therefore be brought into use."—BACON.

"JUNE 10TH—She is engaged—Almyra Marlande. I write that as if it were the most common place thing in the world, instead of being what it is—a blast to all my hopes of once gaining her love. But it is better as it is. And I thank Heaven for the strength it has given me to bear the bitter pang of 'despised love' so well. Some months ago I could not have written of her betrothal to another man so calmly—but latterly I have grown more reconciled to my lot, viz., that I must love and be unloved in return. Why and whence these feelings come, I know not. But there is no anger

and sorrow in my heart. I see him come and go without jealousy, without rage. There is something quietly and bitterly despairing in me—but I am at loss to tell what sentiment it is in reality. Two weeks ago the Marquis Victor de Sansgêne comes to me, with a polite bend, and says in his courteous fashion —

“ ‘ Mr. Steyneville, I hear you are the sole protector and guardian of the fair Miss Marlande.’ ”

Naturally I nodded an assent, wondering what he would say next.

“ I have that lady’s permission,” he went on, “ to ask if you have any objection to my —in brief” with a pleasant courtly smile, “ *becoming your kinsman*, in relieving you of you charge.”

“ Not vulgarly asking miss’s hand in marriage, but, ‘ Have you any objection to my becoming your kinsman ? ’ None other but the Marquis could have said it so finely.

“ Then my kinswoman appeared herself. No blushing, no confusion ; only a beautiful possessed face, with the shadow of a smile on it, and a hand leading Marc Antony, as firm and immovable as her form.

“‘Has his lordship explained himself?’ she asks, turning to me.

“‘Yes,’ I wondered at my own composure, ‘he has.’ I looked at her. She understood my look, but feigned to misunderstand it.

“‘My lord,’ she returned, with a deep curtsey and the ghost of a contemptuous accent in her voice, ‘has honoured me with a proposal, and I have neither the heart nor mind to refuse his *generous* offer.’

“‘Generous!’ The white, glittering hand of the old courtier waved it off.

“‘I have told him,’ she continues, ‘that I shall endeavour to be what he would have me—more I cannot promise.’

“‘Madame,’ he said, taking her hand to his lips, ‘there is no need. I do not ask it even.’

“This was all very polite and chivalric, but a little too formal a love-making for a work-a-day taste like mine.

“June (?) th— To-day two of his relations have called on us—the ladies Vallance. Extraordinarily plain of face, but as if to make up where Nature erred, were gorgeously attired, and were like pictures in one respect, viz., the paint.

“These women, I hear, are the Marquis’s sister and her daughter, and in a fine fury at his desiring to marry again. They are giving a grand reception in a couple of weeks’ time, to introduce the affianced bride of the Marquis to *their* society. Judging by appearances, matters will not go well, for Almyra was curiously agitated and unnerved at their visit. She made awkward mistakes and blunders, trod on their dresses, and behaved in such a style as to make me wonder where the usually composed and graceful manners of my kinswoman had gone. The ladies could hardly hide their satisfaction. Was this the wonderful Miss Marlande—this good-looking, *gauche*, country girl?—with no more manners or conversation than a milk maid. They would warn their friends what a choice their deluded kinsman’s was, and perhaps he could be induced by their united efforts to break the match off.

“They said good-bye affectionately (it is strange how kind women are to other women over whom they are planning malicious and spiteful plots), and as I handed them to their carriage, Lady Bella Vallance whispered to the other, ‘Did you ever see such a creature?’

pretty—but O, so *gauche* and silly! Dear, dear—I can't conceive what that old idiot sees in her.'

"Then that is all I heard, for the coach at that juncture drove off, leaving me standing in the courtyard. When I went in I found Allie seated on the couch in an agony of laughter. Patiently waiting for the fit (a most unusual one) to pass away, I asked her the cause.

"'Why, you dear old grave face,' she said, merrily, taking my face in her two hands, and actually, in her good humour, bestowing a light kiss on each cheek 'did I really act so well for *you* to believe my clumsiness was real? Not a whit! Did ye see how glad the two jezebels were? Won't they be surprised to find me ready to snap my fingers in their faces at the reception? Do you know, Hal,' she added, quite naively, 'I found their half-hour visit to be the hardest trial I ever had in my life.'

"'How so?' said I, daring to stroke the beautiful head so close to mine, without any feeling in my heart but that was pure and fond.

"'O, Hally, I never knew how pro-

digiously difficult it was to be clumsy—till to day—when I tried.'

"July th— She is the ruling toast, and the queen of the hour. At the Vallance reception, where the fairest and noblest of the United Kingdom were gathered, she shone the first in beauty, grace and wit among them. Great men, rich ones, and dandies flocked around her at her entrance. Who was she? None knew. The affianced of the Marquis of Sansgêne—lucky fellow! But that was all. Miss Almyra Marlande—nonsense! She was Venus, born of the sea foam, they said. Her lips were the coral, her skin mother-of-pearl or shell, her eyes the grey-blue of the ocean, her tresses the golden-brown sea-weed, washed by the waters and sparkling in the sun, &c. Yes, she was the modern Venus, and in the coffee-houses she was toasted, not by name, but by the honorary title. She was so good-natured and humored in her naturally contemptuous, careless way, that even the women could not help but admire her.

"‘Ah! I wish I were like you,’ sighed a young lady, a friend of Lady Mary Wortley’s, to her one day.

“ ‘ Bah ! ’ cries Miss Marlande, ‘ like me ? Do you think I feel flattered at being surrounded by a set of face-fanciers, my dear Miss L ? Believe me, not a whit. I am not to be praised because the good God has chosen to give me a face—it is not my work. You are rich—tell me, would you feel flattered if men were to praise you for your wealth ? No.’

“ But for all this, miss was in her element now, gaiety and bustle beginning and ending at morn. At a great sacrifice I was compelled to take lodgings (my giddy kinswoman determined that they should be fine) in town, where all the people that had left us when our dear benefactress died speedily came, eager to renew acquaintanceship. Annie was lost and scared amid a set of rattling, empty-headed and full-pocketed dandies. They voted her dull and stupid. Indeed, their talk shocked and frightened the sensitive girl, who had not a word to say for herself in their midst.

“ Here, again, I met my old college friends and anti-conventionalists, Benedict Hales and Kenneth Twyne. Hales was a suspected socialist, brusque and austere, and, without

being quite a barbarian, conformed as little as possible with the rules of the society in which he moved. His was a wild, untamed spirit, impatient of all restraint, and scorning to lead the inane and vapid existence of his companions. At the time of which I am writing he had, under cover, commenced a social reform in England, but, later on, finding it did not succeed as well as he anticipated, passed over to France, where, with an eloquence at once passionate and sincere, he sowed, among a certain class, seeds of discontent that perhaps would bear later on the fruits of dissension and even revolution.

“Kenneth Twyne, on the contrary, was one of those model young men who are a pride to their parents, without doing anything in particular to make them so, and paid visits not because he liked the people on whom he called, but because he thought it was his *duty*. His morals and manners were unimpeachable, and he wrote namby-pamby milk-and-watery verses addressed principally to mythical young women, faded flowers, birds, and the like. His mamma called him her ‘Kenny,’ and was on the look out for an

eligible helpmate for her boy. He wore a sword which some wicked young fellows declared was never made to draw. Innumerable pranks were played on the unsuspecting guilelessness of this immaculate young man. One, a little more saucy than the rest, I will relate.

"One night, on leaving the play, whither he rarely went, with a puritanical comrade, he was waylaid by a young person who, in tearful accents, begged him to read carefully a note which she was instructed to give him. Our young gentleman goes home and reads the billet to his mamma, which ran to the effect 'that a young rich lady was greatly enamoured of him, and if he would that night secretly make his appearance at the bottom of her window, from which she would presently throw a rope-ladder, he would in no ways be dissatisfied by the results.' Mamma Twyne, blind to everything but the surpassing comeliness and wit of her son, opines that the writer is a lady of spirit, opulence, and education, and, finally, commands him to go, which he does with her blessing, and in a large cloak.

Arrived at the place, he climbs the walls

and falls unromantically on a bush of nettles on the other side. Nothing daunted, the lady-killer picks himself up, and, hastening beneath the window indicated, stands patiently there for some few minutes. As expected the casement opens and a head appears muffled in the meshes of an intricate lace shawl.

“‘ Is that you, darling?’ whispers the owner of the head, cautiously.

“‘ Yes; pray let down the ladder. I am all’—nettles he should have said—‘ fire to see you,’ said the young gentleman.

“‘ Very well.’

“ The head vanishes as cautiously as it appeared, and in its stead a ladder is let down, which our hero ascends on the wings of excitement and joyous anticipation.

“ He enters a small well-furnished apartment lighted by waxen candles. Near the mantelpiece a tall lady is standing, young and handsome, but with features expressive of deep dejection.

“‘ Forgive me,’ she says, ‘ but since I have seen you my peace of mind and heart has completely gone and left me. I am no more the same. My dreams at night are filled with images of you, my thoughts at day are all of

my Kenneth ! And now as you stand before me in all the glorious majesty of transcendant beauty of form, feature, and speech I feel—but it is too much, I cannot express myself—there are words which women's lips dare not—'

"Poor Twyne thought the lady had gone very far already, and scarcely knew what to reply.

"'M—m—madam,' he stammered, 'if to see me is l—l—love, to see y—you is rapture!' and he knew not what more to say.

"'Then, then why do you not demonstrate it?' whispered the fair creature, hiding her modest head in her hands.

"Determining to, or die, our gentleman seized the lady's hands, and was about to take a kiss when—when the door opened with an explosion of laughter which can only emanate from perfect lungs, and about twenty of Twyne's chief tormentors entered. The lady herself commenced a wild dance of delight, and, tearing off an elaborate head-dress, disclosed to view the identical head of my Lord Luvfun ! Poor Ken ! next day the town rang with his adventure of the preceding night, and not being able to face the terrible scandal, he went abroad.

CHAPTER XI.

I HAD only one charge now—three went from Steyneville, and only two returned. The desolate old hall seemed tenfold drearier without her presence. Her chair by the window was vacant; and as I thought of her my eyes would invariably wander to her old seat, there to rest long and sadly. Yes, Almyra Marlande was no more. She was dead—dead to me—though alive to the world. My kinswoman was the Marquise de Sansgêne, and gone abroad already two months with her husband. Theirs was a strange courtship, and to their marriage day lost none of its pristine formality. It was always “Madame” or “Mistress Marlande,” and “My Lord” or “the Marquis.” Nothing nearer or dearer. In his stately

polite way I believe the marquis loved the woman better than anything on earth—better than himself—though not his honour. Had he been asked, somewhat like Demothenes, what was the chief part of a man's existence, he would have answered "Honour." What next? "*Honour.*" What next again? "*HONOUR!*" Not in a spirit of boastfulness and vainglory, but simply and sincerely as a creed early instilled and religiously kept.

I was sitting one night, thinking over the recent event, half nodding in a chair by the fire, when Annie came running in with a frightened expression on her face.

"What's the matter, cousin?" said I, starting up.

"Oh!" cried Annie, "I have been so frightened. You know, cousin, that I have sent Batty over to the Stapletons to give a packet to Sydney from Almyra, which I had forgotten till to-day. Hearing a ring, I opened the hall door myself, and I don't know what to think, for truly, cousin, no sooner had I opened it when a gentleman stepped in, so like you, that I did not doubt for a minute that you had gone out for

something. I closed the door, and he said, in tones just like your own, ‘Is Mr. Steyneville within?’ Thinking it was you, I said, ‘Come, Hal, that cloak does not disguise you so completely as to prevent me from recognising you!’ and laughed. He laughed too; and, O Harold, I took his hand under my arm and sat down to supper, and—and only then I noticed his eyes, instead of being dark like yours, were as blue as the sapphire in your ring,’ she said, pointing to the ring my kind Lady Norton had given me years before.

Struck by a sudden thought at this strange recital, I asked where this stranger was.

“In the breakfast-room. But no, Harold, you shall not go alone; I *will* go with you.”

Suiting the action to her word she ran after me as I in all imaginable haste hurried from the room to that where the unknown visitor was. When I entered he was standing with his arm resting on the mantelpiece, with the same sad expression on his fair countenance as he had stood years ago at college watching his companions in their thoughtless and light-hearted gaiety. I made a step forward. Full of love and

kindness his glorious eyes fell on mine, and in another second we were in each other's arms.

"My dear, dear fellow, this is indeed an unexpected happiness," I said, as soon as the emotion caused by the interview was gone in some degree. "Tell me to what good genius I owe this meeting? Why," I added, putting my hands on his shoulders, "if this is indeed my mirror I shall be like Narcissus for falling in love with myself." My dear kinsman looked so well and handsome that upon my word I could have stared at him for hours. Timely remembering, however, Annie could make nothing of our meeting, I introduced Valerian as an old college friend.

"Is your other cousin from home?" inquired he—"you see I recollect the name—Almyra, of whom, in conjunction with this young lady, you used to speak so much? Do you know," he said, gracefully, addressing Annie, "it seems to me as if I had been acquainted with you for a long time. I'm sure you treated me as an old friend, Miss Marlande," laughingly, "taking me to supper without introduction. It's very

serious. What would you have done if I had turned out to be a robber?"

"I think," says Annie, frankly, prepossessed by his manners and appearance, "I would have done something very unheroic."

"And what is that?"

"Scream and run away," she answered, gaily.

Yet she was brave enough to follow me without knowing what person she had let in.

"You asked for my sister Almyra," said Annie; "she is married two months now, and more."

"Married!" repeated Valerian, astonished, "I thought that—never mind," he added, hastily, "so she is married? I should have liked to have seen her. Is she anything like Miss Marlande here?"

Annie laughed with unfeigned gaiety.

"Excuse me," she said, "but I can see you are a stranger, otherwise you would know that for some time past my sister has been the reigning toast in London. Had she been like me—?"

"Had she been like you?" said the young man, surprised with the straightforward and unenvious disposition of the young lady.

"Had she been like me she would not have been what she was. No," she cried, with some little pride, "Allie is as beautiful as —"

"Indeed, miss, if your kinswoman is one half so beautiful as her sister is good-natured she must be an angel!" returned Valerian, warmly.

"A truce to compliments," said I, wishing to spare Annie's blushes. "How about your lodgings, Valerian. If our old place is not too seedy and dull, what say you to staying here till you are tired of us?"

"Hurrah! Board and lodgings for ever!" cried Valerian, gaily. "Why of course I intend staying with you for a few days! D'ye think now, Hal," he said, fondly laying his hand on my shoulder, "that I have travelled these many nights and days to see you only for half-an-hour! Nay, nay; there will be no getting rid of me so quickly. J'y suis j'y reste, for some time, at all events."

"Your luggage?" I hazarded.

Annie, hearing our welcome visitor was to remain with us, had left the room to assist to prepare an apartment for his use.

"Will be sent on to-morrow. In the meantime tell me about yourself."

"The very question I was about to put to you. You see, dear fellow," said I, sitting down, "mine could not be a very eventful life, as you may perceive, with such peaceful surroundings."

"Ah, Harold," he cried, half bitterly, a shade passing over his face as he spoke, "mountains that shoot forth fire for the destruction of men and cities, are they not always situated in quiet and secluded spots? What was that we learned at Oxford, 'Magna civitas, magna solitudo.' That I have learned in the world is true."

"According to your logic, then, my dear Valerian, I should be crammed full of news, startling and wonderful. But I assure you that I am not."

"Do you know," he said presently, "that I always had an idea, foolish if you will, but still an idea, that you were particularly fond of your cousin? The one that has married," he explained.

"Indeed. But you see she *has* married despite that," I answered, composedly, "and what the world calls *well*, too!"

"Young or old?" he questioned.

“The Marquis de Sansgêne is about fifty odd years, I should say.”

“Putting two and two together, then, Miss Marlande that was, was mercenary,” remarked Valerian. “Thank Heaven, Harold, that you escaped being her husband !”

“Faith ! And that is easier said than done,” I said, as gaily as I could. “In your turn, you should thank the gracious powers that have been merciful enough to spare you the bitterness of a hopeless love.”

“O, God, you don’t know what you say ! Spare me the bitterness of hopeless love ! If you only knew, what awful mockery your words would appear to you !” he said, despairingly, and in a tone that pierced my heart.

“What had I said to rouse the dormant passion in his soul ? What healing wound had I unconsciously touched to make it sting afresh as in its first cruelty ? What hidden chord had I heedlessly felt that it should so resonantly vibrate ?” I asked him, fearfully and pityingly, as he sat before me, with his head buried in his hands—so young in years, so old, so very old in grief.

Fair and opulent, I could not refrain from

thinking that any woman would have been honoured by the love of such a man. As I thought this, after I had interrogated him on the occasion of his anguish, he turned to me a face so full of overwhelming, yet suppressed emotion, that I could but regard him in silent amazement.

“Come, come,” said he, at last, with a faint smile, “I am but a sorry visitor, Hal, to trouble you like this with my woes. You have your own; we all have our troubles in this world—some greater than others. I wonder where Miss Annie has gone?” he added, as if to turn the conversation.

But my compassion being aroused, I besought him to tell me that which so affected him. The result of my appeal was the following brief history of his life subsequent to his leaving college.

CHAPTER XII.

“I SHALL do my best,” he said, clearing his throat and rising from his chair to stand in his favourite position by the mantelpiece, “to make my tale as brief and simple as possible, and you shall be my judge, telling me if I have a right to grieve or no.”

Through the mists of years I saw another form bent by one all-prevailing sorrow, with grey hair, rise up before me in the place of this young man. He, too, had asked me to be a judge for the same cause. My boy’s blood had chilled within me as he told me his wrong, and I had vowed by long labour and courage to render myself worthy of his love, to replace in some measure, by unfailing attention to wishes, that which he had lost. O, for the resolutions ! O, for their carrying out ! O,

for that noble heart now dust in the village churchyard ! I could have wept tears of blood for all three, so dispirited and weary my heart felt within me. My boyhood's hopes, my manhood's ambition and love, were destined to die unrequited. Was I to blame ? Was I indeed content, as Almyra said, "with a rank plot of grass and a bit of blue sky overhead ?" It was Providence ! And calmly and humbly as a man with human longings in his frame could, I bowed beneath its mighty will.

"Are you listening ?" he asked, abruptly, perhaps remarking my momentary inattention.

Yes, I was listening.

"When I left Oxford without seeing you I travelled direct to my lawyer in London, only stopping at a wayside inn to write a few lines acquainting you of my sudden departure. In London my legal guardian," he said, with slight acrimony, "the Lord Chancellor, had provided me with what he considered a suitable person, who was to accompany me on my travels as guide, philosopher, and friend," (with peculiar emphasis on the three last words). "With-

out exactly knowing why, I conceived a strange antipathy for this person at first sight. Far from being ill-looking, his person and address were both favoured by nature and art. By art I mean mental capabilities, for he was extremely well-read and clever. He was supposed to have been of good family, and a Frenchman by birth."

"His name?" I asked, eagerly.

"Desangiers," he returned, slightly surprised, "Charles Desangiers. Do you know the name?"

"No. I beg your pardon for interrupting."

"No harm done. But to return. Not wishing to disturb the arrangements made for me by asking for another companion on the absurd grounds that there was an indescribable something in him which did not please me, I was soon in readiness to go on my tour.

"The day before I left London I paid a final visit to my lawyer, who explained that he had omitted to inform me of a very important codicil in my father's will. 'It is not a very extraordinary one,' said he, 'and one which you will readily understand—from a man so illustrious and noble as your father.' Illus-

trious and noble ! Do you hear that, Harold ? ” he asked, with a bitter smile. . . .

He continued :—

“ The effect of the codicil was this—that, should I marry anyone beneath me in rank, position, breeding, education, or, in short, any woman who was, in the beaten ways of the world, my inferior, my claim to my deceased father’s property would be forfeited and I would be left penniless. Assuring my legal friend that I had no desire to marry any woman, either high or low, I bade him and a few others farewell, and, accompanied by Desangiers, commenced my voyage.

“ Our first visit was to Paris, where nothing of a sufficiently peculiar nature happened to interest even *you*, my dear fellow. Stay ; yes, there is one little incident which I had almost forgotten, and thought extremely singular at the time. Desangiers and I naturally stayed indoors when the weather was inclement, but after a while I grew to dislike his company so heartily, that I preferred to dare the angry elements without than be with him. Even then I could not tell what made me hate him

so. I grew angry with myself, and did what I could to put a clear face on the matter. I could not reconcile myself in the slightest degree to him. One evening, after having taken coffee in his room, I put on my cloak to go out. It was raining hard.

“‘ Surely you don’t intend to go out in this weather?’ he said.

“ But I went out, and returned with my blood in a fever, my face haggard, and my eyes blood-shot. I was put to bed and promptly bled, after which operation I felt so miserably weak that I declared it my intention to make a will.

“ Desangiers was by my bedside. The physician had just left.

“ ‘ You have no relations to whom I might send a letter acquainting them of your malady?’ he asked.

“ I told him no. The secret of our relationship exists only between us. But I informed him that I had a friend whom I loved better than anyone on earth.

“ ‘ It is too late to send for a lawyer to-night,’ he said. ‘ May I ask you—if you are not too fatigued—the name of this gentleman, your friend?’

"I told him. Harold, I need not repeat the name, since the owner of it is here.

"'Steyneville, Steyneville!' he murmured to himself a few times, turning pale. 'Can it be the same? Do you mean one Harold Steyneville, of Steyneville Hall, who served as page for some time to a certain Lady Olympia Norton, first cousin to the notorious Lord Alingdale?'

"Surprised and delighted at his being acquainted with you, I asked him where he had met you.

"He replied, somewhat evasively, that he did not know you personally, but, going by what the world said, you were the blackest villain and rascal that ever stepped on the surface of the earth. Of course he did not know, he was not sure, etc., etc., but one thing was certain, that as a boy your life was marked by the most evil excesses, and, in short, that you were a young debauchee and Heaven only knows what all. Of course, he said, you might have changed as a man, but —

"I stopped his infamous tongue by telling him I wished to sleep. Bidding me good-night, he left me.

"Two days after I was well enough to resume my travels with the companion, law, and not nature, had given me."

* * * * *

"Venice was the next place we visited. After that night's conversation about you I think Desangiers conceived as great a dislike for me as I had for him, and, to my satisfaction, troubled me as little with his society as he could, compatibly with his position as tutor. We were ominously polite in demeanour to each other ; he bowed and scraped to me as usual, and I mistrusted him more than ever.

"Late one evening, in a solitary ramble on the Piazza di San Marco, I was disturbed in a reverie by hearing loud cries for help coming from a little street adjoining the Piazza. I was the only person passing near at the time, so, putting my legs to their best use, I ran in all speed to where the sound proceeded. What a sight met my eyes !—two men with masks endeavouring to force a defenceless woman into a coach which stood hard by. Seemingly, their combined strength would in another minute have prevailed, but Heaven sent the poor

creature a defender in me ! The young woman, seeing a stranger, with a power almost superhuman, burst from her captors, and, throwing herself at my feet, besought my protection.

“Just then the moon, hitherto obscured by an enormous cloud, came out, and I observed kneeling on the ground one of the most beautiful faces it has ever been my lot to see.

“The two men, seeing they had a combatant, advanced with menacing gestures. I drew my sword, and, bidding the poor creature stand behind me, almost sent one of her persecutors to another world. The other one was a skilled swordsman—a better one than I, indeed—but mine was a more advantageous position, and I succeeded at last in wresting his weapon from him. All this time he had not spoken a word. We had gone to work calmly—ay, scientifically even. But now I was determined to know who my adversary was, for something in his build and gestures seemed familiar. Having the advantage over him, I bade him tell me his name.

“‘Curse you for an Englishman ! I’m — if I tell you !’ he answered, in a hoarse whisper.

“‘‘Rascal, I *shall* know,’ I said, and, getting behind him, deftly untied his mask and—”

“You have guessed aright, I see. Yes, it was my guide, philosopher, and friend, Desangiers.”

* * * *

“Shocked by the discovery I made, I hastened my departure from Venice, this time only accompanied by my valet, Weiss. Arrived at Naples, I took apartments in a villa for him and myself, and spent there the first few days of peace and security I had known since Desangiers had accompanied me on my tour.

“Weiss, I believe, is one of the most phlegmatic men of a phlegmatic race. Whilst I was at lunch one day he said coolly, as if it had been the most natural thing in the world, and in his broken English, putting each verb at the end of his sentence —

“‘I know not, sair, if you have it remarked. Since you here haf been a veiled woman you always after goes.’ A free translation from the German, ‘Sie immer nach geht.’

“He informed me further that the veiled woman had not only followed me from place

to place, but had actually given him a note for his master. (He took a packet of letters from his pocket, and, selecting one, gave it to me.) It ran as follows:—

“‘ SIR,—Whoever you are, I entreat you to grant me an interview. . . . I have followed you from Venice. . . . I must see you.

‘ L. V.’

“ What could I do ? Refuse her request ? No, that would not have been manly or generous. Besides, I was burning with curiosity to know who the fair ‘ L. V. ’ could be. Telling Weiss to signify my consent the next time he saw her, I waited two days indoors without any result. The third day, as I was about to give up all hopes of seeing the ‘ incognita,’ she came, and, as Weiss had described her, was indeed a veiled woman.

“ I asked to what good fortune I was indebted for the pleasure of her visit. What inanities a man does utter to be rid of an oppressive and uncomfortable silence ! For the stranger was standing opposite me as motionless as a statue.

“‘ I have followed you,’ she said at last in a

sweet, low voice, and in broken English, ‘from Venice, to warn you of a man who wishes to avenge himself on you.’

“‘On me? I had no enemies. To my knowledge I had never wronged a single person,’ I answered.

“‘Ah, sir, are you indeed so innocent of the world’s ways not to know that they who have most enemies are not wrong-doers, but the pure and good? Above all, they who defend the weak from the injury of the strong and wicked?’ she asked, in a kindling voice. ‘But I see you do not believe my warning. I will go, my duty is done.’ And she moved to the door.

“‘My heart was beating violently. ‘Your duty,’ I stammered; ‘do I know you then, madam?’

“‘Know me?’ she answered, ‘I do not know that. But that I know you, do not doubt.’

“‘I ask but one thing,’ said, I ‘will you raise your veil ere you go, to see, at least, whom I have to be grateful for. I will take your warning, and leave to-morrow. My unknown enemy—’

“I was interrupted, and the thread of my

discourse was broken. It was she, Harold, she whom I had rescued from Desangier's clutches, that I saw as she raised her black veil.

“‘I see with happiness that you remember me,’ she said. ‘Ever since that night, Englishman, when you defended me, I have thought and dreamed of you. In your cold country, where the snow and cold seems to have chilled the hearts of men and women, they would scorn me for saying so much, and you do well to do as they do.’ For I had turned from her. In truth she had not been much *from* my thoughts since my eyes had dwelt on her beautiful face. And now the temptation was terrible, and I turned so she should not see the struggle within me. She was so young, Harold, scarcely twenty, and of humble extraction.

“‘Indeed, madam,’ I said, earnestly, ‘you wrong me; I turn with no scorn from you.’

“‘Madam! I am but a poor singer,’ she cried, with a blush.

“‘And your parents?’ I asked hastily, ‘where are they? Is it with their knowledge you come here?’

“‘Yes,’ she answered, with innocent dignity

‘ they know I have come here to warn my protector. I told them this morning—in my prayers to Heaven.’

“ ‘ They are dead, then, my poor child,’ I could not help saying, pityingly.

“ ‘ They are in Heaven, sir ! ’

“ ‘ With whom do you live ? ’ I said, after a pause, more struck than ever by her beauty, innocence and simplicity.

“ ‘ O, la mere Gracci—an old woman. That man,’ she said, with a shudder at the recollection, ‘ from whom you freed me that night, heard me sing, and had pursued me ever since. As I was returning home late, passing through a lonely street — ’

“ I told her, as I saw the pain the recital caused her mind, that she need recapitulate nothing more about that scoundrelly Desangiers, that I fully believed her warning, and to show her how I would act on it would take my leave of the country as soon as possible.

“ ‘ Will you leave it for ever ? ’ she said, slowly, fixing her large eyes on me, sadly and appealingly.

“ What could I say, what could I do ? Already I confess my heart was infatuated with

this strange creature, almost a woman in years, and yet a child in simplicity and trustfulness.

“ But I told her it would be better for both that we parted, and that I cordially thanked her from the bottom of my heart for the trouble she had taken. I said all this as coolly as I could, and she believed me. With a great sob she moved once more to the door.

“ ‘ At least,’ said I, gently, ‘ you will tell me the name of her to whom I am so much indebted ? ’

“ ‘ Lorenza Vilani,’ she replied. ‘ O, that she had never seen you.’

“ ‘ Why ? ’ I asked, with a thrill of strange delight that I had never known before, and yet I knew or had guessed the answer before it came from her sweet lips —

“ ‘ Because she loves you.’

“ Not blushingly, but purely and honestly, as a child would say to its mother. ‘ Had she but blenched,’ as Hamlet says, ‘ I would have known my cause.’ But she did not, her fair eyes looking into mine after her confession as simply and innocently as before it.

“ Again I ask you, Harold, what could I

do? Shun this dear woman who had so fascinated me, and held me spellbound by her wealth of love and trustfulness, I could not. As she stood, slowly retreating from me as if to go, I felt that my future happiness and peace of mind depended solely on her. I knew if she left me my life would be embittered by remembering that one who loved me, whom I loved, could have— But what am I saying? What obstacle prevented me from making this woman my wife? She was not wholly uninstructed, and as good as beautiful. Only think, to have passed scatheless and untainted through all the temptations that youth and inexperience and publicity are subject to, must she not have been half an angel? She was not to leave me—by Heaven, no! Not all the wills, estates, and fathers in the world should wrest her pure love from me, and I —”

“ You, my poor Valerian? ” I asked, as he paused in his excitement.

“ I,” he responded, quietly—“ I *married* her! ”

* * * * *

“ Six months of uninterrupted happiness passed away; had you been there to par-

ticipate in my felicity, I felt that indeed my earthly cup of joy was full to flowing over."

I pressed his hand. Even in his great love he had thought of me—kind brother, dear friend!

"We saw little society," he continued, "nor did we require any at all. The days fled by so quickly that we laughed and wondered, as the months rolled on, how we had spent them. Neither of us knew, and both were extremely happy in each other.

"I had some thoughts of taking my wife to England. I spoke to her of it, but she seemed afraid. Of what? Listen--

"'I am so ignorant,' she would say, timidly, 'that I would rather stay here. And so foolish! it would take me years and years of trouble to get used to your English men and women.'

"So I dropped the subject, seeing it was distasteful to her. She did not know my station, but supposed me to be an agent of some kind for some English firm. Indeed, she had such a horror for Albion's peers and peeresses, such a dread and fear, that I was resolved to withhold my real position from her. For myself, I would not have given one

dear hair of her head for all the overbearing insolence, mis-called breeding, of our English dames in the world. She was really a child of Nature, as pure as the parent to whom she was an honour. Could I have brought this thing of sunshine and gaiety to the fogs and formality of our isles ? Could I have seen her among a set of women who would sneer at her manners and her want of *ton* ? *Ton*, forsooth ! if artificiality, hypocrisy, and truckling to those in greater power, constitute the signification of *ton*, it must be confessed the maids and matrons of our times have a prodigious amount ! Could I have seen her mocked, gibed at, sneered upon, and envied unmoved ? And yet such a thing would surely occur if I took her away. So I was resolved, for her sake, to live and die in the South, where the relentless finger of scorn would not be pointed upon her. Every month I went into the city and stayed there about two days, to see if any letters awaited me, as I had none addressed to my residence. I did this for many reasons, too numerous and tedious, indeed, to recapitulate. Suffice to say, on returning from one of these journeys, instead of finding my Lorenza

waiting for me with a joyful smile and open arms, she met me with a constrained and downcast demeanour, which I was at loss to understand. When I questioned her on her altered manner, she excused herself on the plea of ill-health, with which I was fain to be satisfied. I asked Weiss if anyone had called during my absence. ‘Only an old woman,’ he replied. ‘A poor old woman, to whom madame is very kind, that is all.’ After another month I again left my wife for the purpose I have already explained. When I returned Lorenza appeared unusually gay and delighted, and welcomed me with even more than her usual kindness. My suspicions were completely allayed, and I reproached myself for ever having doubted her affection.

“‘Valerian,’ she said to me as if jestingly one day, ‘I have never asked you before, but really I have a woman’s curiosity to know. What is it you do when you leave me? Where do you go?’

“‘On business, my Lorenza,’ I answered readily; ‘which must be attended to.’

“‘Business?’ she repeated, laughingly, laying her fair head on my shoulder. ‘And will not my Valerian tell me what business?’

“Unwilling to tell her the true cause of my leaving her alone, I made some blundering excuse, for which Heaven forgive me.

“She appeared satisfied.

“‘Now, as you have told me so much,’ she said, ‘tell me of your relations in the land of snow’ (so she called England); ‘of your father and mother, and —’

“‘I have neither,’ I answered.

“‘Are they dead, like mine?’

“‘Yes.’

“‘Have you no relations at all in the world?’ she asked, as if impelled to question me by some irresistible curiosity.

“‘No—none; that is, yes. But what am I saying? I mean no—none whatever,’ I replied confusedly, thinking of our relationship, Harold, which I was resolved to keep, even from my wife.

“She drew from me with a sigh, and left the room.

“At the time I did not notice it, being absorbed in some selfish reflection of my own.”

“Selfish, Valerian!” I exclaimed, heartily. “These are two words that none can put together with any degree of truth.”

“Thank you,” he said simply.

“ But to return.

“ Two months had passed away, and being anxious to know if any letters had arrived for me from England, I again left Lorenza, this time for—but you will hear,” he said, abruptly.

“ When I bade her ‘ au revoir ’ she seemed to cling to me as if loath to let me go. I never said good-bye, always ‘ au revoir,’ and was answered with the same greeting.

“ ‘ Addio Carissima,’ she said, tearfully.

“ ‘ Not “ Addio,” ’ I cried. ‘ You know, Lorenza, that that is a forbidden word between us; say “ Arividarci,” cara mia.’

“ ‘ We are like children,’ she said, with I know not what of sorrow in her voice that thrilled and saddened me. ‘ Why not “ Addio?” ’ Tis just as well to have said that to one we may never see again.’

“ ‘ Lorenza, my love,’ I cried, frightened and amazed with what I had heard, enfolding her in my arms, ‘ why do you speak like this? I shall not leave you.’

“ ‘ Nay, nay, I do not speak cruelly,’ she replied earnestly, ‘ it is your fancy. What! you will not perform your duty because of a

woman's tongue? Love, that is foolish. When I said that it is best to say "Addio" in case we might never meet on earth again, I meant that one of us might die. 'Tis probable; we none of us know Heaven's will before it is worked. Why,' she cried with a laugh that quite deceived me, 'do not look so glum. Are you a clever man, and do not know that we may die any minute, any second in the day? I do not say, mind,' she added, with mock seriousness, 'that one of us is going to die in this particular instance; only, you see, I have a woman's pertinacity, and will have my own way; it is best to say 'Addio.'

"It was 'Addio.' I rode away with a lightened heart, and saw my love wave her kerchief from the casement, enframed by the creeping vine, with the light and colour of the heavens and sun in her eyes and hair, her fair face beaming with beauty and love.

* * * * *

"'Where is madame?' I asked, the first thing on my return.

"'In the garden,' answered Weiss. 'Very likely she did not hear the Herr's return. Should he acquaint her of it? The last he

saw of her was that madame was reading on the bench.'

"I preferred to go myself. Opening the wicket I turned into the beautiful garden at the back of the villa. Ah! what a peaceful scene comes back to me, Harold, when I close my eyes. The sun was just sinking, and the flowers filled the air with their scent. I remember the drowsy hum of the insects, the rustle of the leaves in the soft wind, the splash of the fountain, as if I saw and heard it all only yesterday. As I walked on to the bench unsuspectingly I can even recollect the creeping of a lazy beetle across my path, and the church bells in the distance tolling out for evening prayer. Yes, there sat Lorenza on the moss-covered bank asleep surely; her book and surroundings had lulled her to it I thought. Her large sun hat, with its cherry coloured ribbons, was lying unheeded, with the volume she had been reading, on the grass by her side. Her eyes were closed. She dreamed of something pleasant, indeed, for her parted lips wore a smile of great content, and her brow was unruffled and calm. I came a step nearer and yet I feared to call her name, for she looked so strangely sweet

and beautiful in her slumber. The light wind had blown a few sunny curls on her forehead, and her little white hands were folded together.

“‘Lorenza,’ I cried, suddenly, becoming alarmed at the continued silence, ‘Lorenza, awake my love, I am come.’ But to my appeal there came no answer. The bright eyes that responded to my voice, ere her lips moved to speak, did not open. With a fearful heart I took another step nearer, and yet another, and an awful sound burst from my lips. She was”—as I thought, with an effort.

“Asleep?” I suggested, taking his hand in mine.

“Asleep! yes; but it was the deep sleep that knows no wakening—it was Death,” he cried, with a great tearless sob.

“I have not yet finished,” he said, after he had recovered; “the worst remains yet to be told—read this letter Harold, it is one I found addressed to me in the house.”

It ran as follows, and was written in Italian :—

“I die by my own hand, my Valerian, for it shall never be said that she who loved thee so was selfish enough to marry the great and

noble lord of England, knowing that by this marriage all his goods and titles should be confiscated. For I have been told that, in wedding one of inferior rank, my husband (I may call thee by that name now, on the brink of the grave), thou losest all right to wealth and honour, which otherwise would be thine. I have freed thee! O, it was a hard struggle at first to think we two—we that have been *one*, should part, and for ever. O, how long must be ‘for ever,’ ‘eternity’ without thee, when even a day spent in thy absence seemed as years; so drearily and long the hours dragged on! But they say death brings peace and rest, and with the good, that their souls fly to heaven! But for this last act of mine, I should be good. Heaven will pardon me. It was love for thee that brought me to it. But if my soul flies to heaven I will live again. And life without thee! O, the darkness, the black, black darkness and unconsciousness of an everlasting death is preferable. God, in thy gracious goodness, let me and my soul die for ever. . . . These last few lines I have written in a kind of madness; forgive them, I am calmer now. . . .

“Why did you leave me to obtain letters (you see I know) from another place? Why did you not, if they were innocent and harmless, have them addressed to our home? Why did you blush and hesitate when I asked you if you had any kindred alive? Ah! I fear that what I heard is true, *that you have a wife in England!* I will not think of you as a deceiver. I will not think of you in any other light, my love, than that in which I knew you—loving, generous, kind and noble.

“If I have wronged you by thought or deed may Heaven forgive me, and as truly as I forgive your sins, which dying believes and pardons,

“LORENZA.”

When I had read this letter, Valerian gave me another.

“This note,” said he, “I subsequently found out had been given to Lorenza by the old woman, a tool in the hands of a scheming devil. Read it.”

“MADAME,

“Alas! that so much purity and goodness should be deceived by one who hides the arts of a Machiavel behind so gentle and

fair a mask. I am a stranger to you, but know the man who passes for your husband too well. He is an English *nobleman*, and the sole representative of a proud family, who have forbidden him, under pain of disinheritance, to marry beneath him. That is to say, that this man whom you love so devotedly has deceived you and is doing so still. He is a profligate scoundrel, unworthy of the affection you bestow upon him. If you doubt, ask him why he leaves you every now and again, and from whom the letters he receives come? Ask him of his kindred. He will answer you falsehoods, hesitate, and dissemble. By this you will be enabled to detect him, and so bear testimony to the truth of my assertions. He writes and receives letters—but not at home. Away from the simple girl he has deluded, he indites letters to his *English wife*, and receives in turn messages from her. Again, if you doubt me, why does he *leave you* to correspond with his English kindred and friends? If all were correct, could he not just as well send and receive communications from and to his home. Doubt me! Search among the few letters he brings to his house, and

you will find some perhaps from one ‘Harold Steyneville’—this person is as great a libertine and hypocrite as his friend—if the noble sentiment ‘friendship’ can be said to exist between two such heartless villains. Possibly this man ‘Steyneville’ may mention two women ‘Almyra’ and ‘Annie;’ these—but I will not pollute your ears with further details. It rests but with you to prove my statements, which require but little to be established as convincing evidence of your *lover’s* infamy and deception.

“A WELL-WISHER.”

The paper fluttered from my hands —

“Here, read this,” said Valerian, hoarsely, his eyes scintillating with suppressed fury. “I know the writer of it, ‘Desangiers’—a ‘Well-Wisher!’ Here’s a scrap of her journal.”

“It is all true. O, God! how can I bear this trial? Searching for a letter to-day in his room, from Harold Steyneville, I found this” Attached to the paper was a scrap of a letter I had written to Val. “‘A heavy blow has fallen on me, dear Valerian—my beloved mistress, Lady Norton,

is no more. . . . But I thank Heaven that I have still my beautiful Almyra and my gentle Annie to comfort me' . . . Is this the dear friend of my husband" (was written beneath) "a man who bewails the loss of one mistress one minute, and the next blasphemous for still having *two* more left to solace him?"

* * * *

"Through this man, Desangiers, she poisoned herself. Believing me to be the guilty wretch—

"Stay a minute, Valerian!" I exclaimed, struck with a sudden idea. "Do you remember me telling you at college of my history, and how I had helped to save my Lady Norton from falling a victim to the spy de la Motte?"

"Ye—yes, I recollect; but what on earth has *he* to do with all I have been telling you?" asked Valerian, with a puzzled expression.

"He has this much to do with it," I replied, calmly. "De la Motte the spy and Desangiers are one and the same person."

CHAPTER XIII.

“INDEED, my dear kinsman”—he started as I so addressed him—“you are right—you have a greater cause for sorrowing than I.”

“Sorrowing!” he repeated, after a pause. “Sorrowing! Let but that Desangiers come once across my path, and he shall do so no more. I will shoot him as I would a dog that had bitten me. Look here, Harold, my aim now in this life is to hunt that man down. When once in my grasp, may Heaven have mercy on his soul, for I’ll have none on his body!”

“Come, come,” said I, “if the subject is not too painful, may I ask you a few questions regarding the poor girl who fell a victim to her own want of faith?”

“No, Harold, not that! You cannot understand her nature. Want of faith!

When you say that, I feel you malign her and her memory."

"Yes, want of faith," I pursued, with a steady purpose. "What woman of sense, loving and trusting her husband, I understand from you, as she did, would have taken her life, instead of showing you the anonymous letter for an explanation?"

"You speak like a logician. Ah! me, my poor Lorenza was none!" he said, with a sad, sad smile. "It was her very love for me that made her act as she did. Do you think that she, more loving and less calculating than any of her sex, would stay to *reason* with all these fearful proofs, as she thought, of my guilt in her mind? No, this poor girl, rash and precipitate though you judge her deed, preferred death to discovering my perfidy, my deception—I, O God, who am innocent of both! Ah! you did not know her, Harold, to speak of her showing me this cursed letter! She was so ignorant of malice, so trusting and truthful, that she believed *all*; with those proofs the villain Desangiers gave her—and finding this piece of your letter, which of course she naturally misconstrued—"

"Poor girl!" I said, compassionately; "hers was an untimely and bitter end."

There was a pause.

"Do you believe in fate, or Providence?" said Valerian, presently.

I could not help being taken aback by the suddenness of the question, and begged him to tell me why he asked.

"It is so strange," he replied, "what I am about to say, that I am not sure but that you will feel inclined to laugh. Do, if you please; I shall join in," he added, with a shrug.

Assuring him that, however risible his narration might be, I felt in no humour to laugh or smile just then, he said—

"What I am about to tell you, if not long, is curiously true. Do you know, Hal, fate or not fate, Providence or no Providence, that all people for whom I may have evinced a liking, even from my childhood, and who have regarded me with some affection, have invariably come to a bad end! Dying, or visited by some misfortune. The fact is, I believe I am what the Germans call a 'Pechvogel.' Do you want examples? I will give you a few. When my father died he left me under

the guardianship of a good man, who died not long after becoming acquainted with me. Before this I had two little humble playmates—a girl and boy, twin sister and brother—for whom I had conceived a liking, because they were so much alike and so pretty. They used to play with my toys whilst I watched on, pleased to see me pleased. They grew in time, I don't know how, to be quite fond of me; so much so, indeed, that one day when I was ill in bed with the fever my two little friends burst into the room and began to hug and kiss me, calling me all the endearing names imaginable. The nurse, who had left my bedside to make me a cooling drink, came in soon after to see the dear children petting me. In consternation she sent them home, which they had left without their friends' knowledge; and when I asked her how they had come in, she said they must have evidently crept in unseen, and taking advantage of their diminutiveness had paid me a visit. Poor children! their last. I recovered, *they* died. My kisses were their death."

He paused and looked moodily before him, as if in the distance of his thoughts he

could see two little graves where his former playmates lay.

“At college,” he pursued, “I met with you. Tell me, Harold, have you been very fortunate since you have known me? Have not sorrows fallen thick upon you in losing your benefactress, the ruin of your prospects, and your cousin’s marriage?”

“Fancy! It’s all fancy, my dear fellow,” I rejoined, “slightly tinged with superstition.”

I answered this at random, not really knowing how to respond to his question.

“Fancy!—Superstition!” he ejaculated. “I wish I could believe it to be no more. Tell me again, was it fancy to love and lose, as I have loved and lost? Is it superstition to think that there is a curse upon me, which blasts all things I love and which withers all I touch? It may be so to others, not to me—I have too many hard and cruel proofs to dream even otherwise. Are not the sins of the parents visited on the children? Is it not my *duty* to believe I am cursed?”

“Please, Master Harold” (I was always Master Harold with Batty), “Miss Annie ses—good lord!” exclaimed the good old

creature, catching sight of Valerian's face; then checking herself almost directly afterwards, she said, "I thought it couldn't be—"

"Couldn't be what, Batty?" I inquired, not knowing whether to laugh or be vexed at the interruption.

"Couldn't be like you—that gentleman," she explained. "Miss Annie tells me as a visitor came most eggsactly like young master, and tells me to make some excuse to drop in here permiscuous-like to see him. But, the Lor' bless you, *I* knew it all beforehand!" she added, exultantly.

"What! What did you know?" I asked.

"Why, that the strange gentleman *couldn't* be like you any ways; and now I'm positive certain he ain't like you."

"That's curious," I answered, laughingly, knowing Batty's obstinacy. "We have been taken for each other."

"I always ses," says Batty, decidedly, "as there never was, or will be, anyone like young master; an' now I'm more certain sure than ever. Yes, I am," she added, nodding her head, and looking at Valerian as on a usurper of my rights.

"Come, come," said I, standing next to him, who seemed as amused as I with the good soul's obstinacy, "now look at us both together, and see if you can find the resemblance."

"Your noses is much alike," said Batty, closely scrutinizing us, "as is also your foreheads, shapes of the faces, mouths, and chins—likewise your eyebrows, height, and build is similar. But, there," she added, with a toss of her head, and as stubborn as ever, "them who ses as you two gentlemen is more alike than that, must have eyes at the back o' their heads, and see double ! For I do declare, beyond them few features as I've just said, I can't see you are alike at all. An' if I lives to be a hundred year old, will never see any differently. There, gentlemen!" and with a dignified curtsey and a toss of the head, expressive of defiance to any unlucky mortal who would venture to oppose her opinions, she sailed majestically out of the room.

Birch, since his loved master's death, had become more taciturn and crusty than ever. I may even add that my kinswoman's marriage had heightened his unsociable qualities;

Almyra, indeed, was the only person of man, woman, and child to whom he would vouchsafe to speak in an open and unguarded manner. From a child he had loved the little pattering feet and chattering tongue of her tiny ladyship, for so he called her. Until womanhood, wayward and beautiful, he had worshipped her in a respectful loving fashion that was strange to see. I believe his moroseness and silence sprung from one source—his utter and entire disbelief in the sincerity of man. Everyone who spoke to him (and the kinder the worse) wanted, in plain words, “to pump him,” so, to use his own words, “he kept close.” I have noticed many men like him in my journey through life, and have come to the conclusion—right or wrong—that the closer a man is the less he has to keep. Those mysterious “an’ I would an’ if I could’s” are only meant to keep up appearances. They are a snare and a delusion to the innocent and guileless only, who gaze with awe-struck eyes on the supposed possessor of wonderful secrets. I do not agree with a certain great king (the one who gave to the world such highly-

moral proverbs, and failed but in one respect, and that was to give the precedent) who said something to this effect, "that a fool was known by his speech, and a wise man by his silence." This monarch was evidently a judger of men by their words and not by their acts. For my part, I know many a fool that is silent, and many a wise man that is loquacious, and I have no doubt that many more do, too, beside myself.

But to return to my crusty, but trusty, old Birch and his regard for Almyra. When she was leaving Steyneville as a home for ever, and the coachman was just about to whip up the horses for starting, my cousin put her head out of the carriage window and cried gaily—

"Have I said good-bye to all? Where's Birch?"

We heard a hurried step on the gravel walk, and Birch appeared on the scene, immovable as ever.

"Ah, Birch," said Allie, putting her hand out to him, "I am delighted you have come. I was almost afraid you had forgotten me—you, who have always been so good to me, too. But, see here," she continued, "I

have had this little picture of me done for you as a good-bye gift, and here's a purse—don't refuse it, although I know it is a poor return for all the patience you have had with me; but please accept it, for my sake—do," she urged, as he hesitated.

He took what she held out to him, the purse and the picture. The latter he raised to his lips with a lifeless motion; the former he looked at depreciatingly, and said, in the same lifeless way, that it would do to buy him a nice coffin with.

Allie laughed good-humouredly at this.

"Why, Birch, you don't mean that, surely?" she asked.

He gazed straight before him, immovable and unchanged, like a humble piece of expressionless statuary.

"Well, good-bye, Birch. I am sorry you will not even wish me happiness," she said, half-regretfully and a very little cynically.

"Ah, les Anglais," murmured the Marquis at her side, with polite disapproval of the man's lack of manners.

But there is a grief that is too deep for words. Scarcely had the carriage, with its occupants, driven off amid a shower of rice

and a pair of Allie's little old shoes—scarcely had we re-entered the house with saddened hearts—when, on looking out of one of the upper windows, I beheld a sight that restrained me in giving way to my own selfish emotion.

We had all entered the hall but Birch. He had been left standing in a fixed and immovable state, staring in a vacuum which had lately been filled by the Marquis's carriage. Now, as I looked out of the window, I saw his position was changed; his face was buried in his hands, and to all appearances the poor fellow was giving way to violent grief. There was even something exquisitely comical in this, and had I been in a less sorrowful mood I would have laughed. For even in the depth of an unfeigned grief old Birch had lost none of his desire "to keep close," but, ever and anon, fearing lest someone might be watching him, he restrained his tears and looked cautiously round; believing himself unobserved, he gave free scope to his grief, then stopped again and looked about him. Seeing no one near, he once more applied himself with increased fervour to his lamen-

tations. He might have been a male Niobe mourning for the loss of his children, or Suspicion and Grief in turn personified.

I heard him murmur between his sobs,
“O, may you, dear Miss Allie, be happy !
O, may you be happy !”

And the unbended heart that beat above him, in the breast of an erring, wearied, and disappointed fellow-man, echoed the prayer—

“ May she be happy ! O, may she be happy.” The petition did not reach its destination, for the rain and hail fell fast, and the wind drove it back again from whence it came.

CHAPTER XIV.

STAPLETON did not die. It is true for about the space of three weeks after *her* marriage that he gave himself up to a melancholic frenzy and untidiness of person usually attributed to disappointed lovers and poets ; but after this he mended apace, and soon became the Butterfly I had known at college.

When I first met him, two days after Almyra had left Steyneville, he exhibited all those outward manifestations of grief which, as I say, are peculiar to two species of humanity, lovers and poets.

His hair was tangled and unbrushed, his hose, after the manner of Hamlet, “ down-gyved to the ankle,” his waistcoat half un-

buttoned, the ruffles in his breast and round his sleeves torn and stained, his eyes wild and rolling ; and, to complete the eccentricity of his appearance, wore a large cloak draped over the left shoulder. This was all very well and romantic, but the graceful effect was spoiled, inasmuch as the folds not only fell down his back toga-like, but trailed in the mud behind. Sydney, unconscious of his bedraggled state, walked on, I think, in a sort of majestic delight in having something to grieve for.

I was taking a stroll with Valerian and Annie, who could not forbear laughing at the extraordinary figure of our friend.

“ Why, Sydney,” said Valerian, accosting him, “ on my honour, I scarcely knew you ! ”

“ No ? ” with a morbid delight in having been successful in his attempts. “ No ? I daresay not. I daresay not. I scarcely know myself. I am changed, I know.”

“ It is not yourself—it is your dress,” rejoined Valerian. “ Come, be a man ; it is perfectly ridiculous to walk about like this, in broad daylight, above all things.”

Sydney shook his head mysteriously, and looked at me as much as to say, “ Poor

fellow! he does not know the pangs of a despised passion! I shall not unfold my grief to him!"

"I know all about it," pursued Valerian, with a smile; "and Hal, here, hasn't told me. You fancy yourself in love with the Marquise of Sansgêne, and give yourself all sorts of vapours, as only men of no sense can when they think themselves in love. Don't be angry, but let me assure you that had you loved—did you love with any amount of sincerity and truth—you wouldn't waste your time in bewailing the lost object of your affections, but, on the contrary, rejoice that she has married happily, and a man of her choice."

This argument, sound and moral as it was, failed to have the slightest effect.

"Very comforting!" grumbled Sydney, "to have the whole of England gabbering about me. Can't a man," asked he, in an injured tone, "go about in what dress he chooses without being catechised?"

"You're right," interrupted Valerian; "besides, to use your old phrase, what odds? In a hundred years it will all be the same. Don't you think so, Miss Annie? This

gentleman," he said, merrily, pointing to Sydney, "used to be a philosopher once. Philosopher, indeed! Look at him!"

Now this is what Sydney greatly prided himself in being—a philosopher!

Valerian had touched him on a sore point. He was right certainly. A philosopher had no right to be in love, and if he were disappointed, should by no means make his baffled hopes manifest. To keep up appearances, and not to let anyone see that he could be easily talked over, Sydney maintained his right of wearing the "suit of motley" by practically demonstrating it. But little by little the absurd costume was supplanted, and at the expiration of three weeks Sydney appeared again on the world's stage in his true character, much, I need not add, to the satisfaction of his friends and admirers.

* * * *

To-day Sydney came to me with a face drawn to a portentous length.

"Just think! You know how my mother wants me to marry? Hang marriage! Of all the abominable institutions—ugh—"

"Never mind expressing your opinions

just now on the holy state. Tell me the cause of your indignation ? ”

“ Well, you know how the old woman wants me to marry ? ” (I can’t help it if Master Syd chose to be irreverent.) “ Yes ? For some time past, then, she has been on the look out for a suitable match for me ”— emphatically.

“ And you don’t appear to be at all grateful,” said I.

“ O, gratitude be d—d ! Venus and Pallas combined wouldn’t be worth a glance after —after *her*,” he said, with something very like a sigh of regret. “ But when it comes to having a regular Gorgon for an intended wife, then human patience ceases, and the man becomes— ”

“ My dear Sydney,” I rejoined, “ if you are going to speak in enigmas or metaphors for your amusement do so, I beg—don’t let my presence disturb you—but if, on the other hand, you wish— ”

“ Ye gods ! ” says the philosopher, irritably, “ I am trying to make my sorrows as plain as I can to you. I’ll tell you what it is, Harold Steyneville, Esq., my belief is that the country is spoiling your intellect. But to

return to our muttons, as they say in Dutch ; my mamma has fixed her eye on a lady whom she intends for my future bride. She isn't bad looking, and is extremely rich. Being of a very good family, and her people willing to give her hand to the only son and heir—”

“ And fortune smiling on all,” I put in.

“ Fortune smiling on all ! Yes, that's you all over. But, nevertheless, you're wrong—for there's one great obstacle that prevents the betrothal, despite the kinsmen and women on both sides doing their very best, from taking place, and that is—” he paused.

“ Well, that's peculiar,” said I. “ What can the obstacle be ? The lady young, good-looking, rich, and agreeable ; the young gentleman agreeable ” (Sydney made a grimace), “ rich, not bad-looking, and young. What can it be ? ” I asked again.

“ It is not so very much,” returned Sydney, thoughtfully ; “ but the fact is, we cordially detest each other.”

“ How do you know she dislikes you ? ” I asked.

“ How do I know ? ” repeated Sydney. “ We were left in a room together one day

and alone. So she came up to me, and said, ‘Do you know why we’re left to ourselves?’ ‘Of course,’ I answered, with supreme disgust. ‘They want me to make love to you; and I’m hanged if I will.’ ‘I’m glad to hear that,’ she said, steadily. ‘You wouldn’t believe what a comfort your words are to me—because I thoroughly dislike you!’ I was so delighted to hear it that I seized her hand, and, kneeling, kissed it. She grew quite pale, and drew back. ‘Oh, don’t be afraid,’ I said, ‘I only took that liberty because my gratitude was too great for words.’ Then, as I was in the act of kissing her hand again, in walk a troop of her relations, with my mother at their head. What could I do? Kneeling like a love-sick idiot at her feet, they took it for granted that I was smitten.”

I could not forbear laughing at the thought of seeing my poor friend in such an unenviable position.

“It was quite vain for me to expostulate,” continued Sydney, joining good-humouredly in the laugh against himself; “and since that time I’ve been in a fine mess. Every day I have been compelled to call on the

lady ; every day she receives me with worse grace. In a week's time we are giving a masked ball, and at twelve o'clock our wretched betrothal is to be made public. All through that going down on my knees and kissing her hand because I was so glad she hated me," he groaned. "It's too bad. I shan't survive it; unless *you* help me out of it," he added, brightening up.

"I, my dear fellow ! In the name of all that's wonderful, how ?"

"First I must tell you her name. It is Hilaria de Montbron."

I started. What was there in the name that made me feel so uncomfortable ? I had met this lady five or six times in London at my Lady Vallance's, and before that had been a devoted slave of hers when she stayed at Norton Castle, during my dear mistress's lifetime. But that was all. I had liked her as a boy. *Then* her artificial graces and her brilliant *esprit* had a charm for me. Some how or other, in later years (whether the fault of the fascinated or fascinator) the sparkling conversation of this same person seemed too like tinsel ; and as for her smiles and amiability, I blushed to find what little

effect they had on me. O, what a fond, foolish deluded boy I must have been to have liked so sham and shallow a woman ! But, my worthy mentor, Commonsense, 'tis ever thus. I tell thee, young men and boys, profligates and fools, seek the flowers they would wear in hot-houses, where false heat hath produced false fragrance and false beauty ; wise men and old men, true men and hermits, seek *their* blossoms by the mountain side where the natural air of heaven hath made real fragrance and real beauty.

But to return to Miss de Montbron. I had endeavoured not to notice that the few times I had seen her at my Lady Vallance's she had tried to win me by sighs and ogles, flirting with other men with her eyes and attention rivetted the while on me. Not, be it said, that I truly believe the lady had any particular regard for me, but simply because she wanted to storm my stronghold, and take possession of my heart, so she might have the delight of stringing it with so many others to festoon her triumphal car. But I absolutely refused to be enchanted, although she did say, "I was a hard-hearted man," "Mr. Noheart, of Without Love Castle," etc. etc.,

and various other pretty names, all after the style of the cognomens of the gentlemen in the "Pilgrim's Progress." The fortress remained unshaken, and the besieger wasted precious darts and arrows on an impregnable fort. Subsequent to my return from London to Steyneville, I had forgotten all about my fair friend, and now that Sydney mentioned her name I could scarcely repress a start, as the recollections of past times crowded upon me.

"Jupiter Olympus!" exclaimed Sydney.
"Now I have it! Why, *you're the man!*"

"The man!" I ejaculated. "What man?"

"*The man!* My Trojan," returned the other, clapping me on the back. "The man of men—otherwise the chosen of the people. You, in brief," he added, with a shriek of demoniacal laughter, "are he she loves, and I am as good as free. Ha! ha! he!"

"Come, Sydney," said I, seriously, "you madcap, how can you say such a thing?"

"With a good solid basis of truth," interrupted the volatile philosopher; "and I only blame myself for not seeing it before. She told me that she loved somebody, and refused to tell me the name. After I had in-

formed her about—you know,” he said, his light manner changing to something like sadness.

“For all that, I don’t know how you—” I began.

“Well, I scarcely know myself,” said Sydney. “But I guessed it directly you started, and the truth flashed over me like—like lightning.”

“And *on* me like a thunderbolt!” I groaned.

“You don’t mean to tell me that she is a matter of indifference to you?” questioned Sydney, looking at me reproachfully.

“Indeed, she is.”

“Phew!” whistled the other. “Thought I had got out of it so nicely. But, look here, comrade, won’t you help me?”

“I do not really see—” I began, in embarrassment.

“Wait a bit. I have it. Will you wear a certain dress, mask and wig, at our ball? I’ll send ‘em. Only say, only promise, you’ll take neither off till one o’clock.”

Thinking recent events had helped to disorganize the healthful functions of his brain, I could not help looking anxiously at him.

His merry eyes met mine, sparkling with delight and mischief.

“Why, what on earth’s in the wind now?” said I, my face reflecting Syd’s smile.

“Look ye here, old fellow. By a curious coincidence, our ball falls on All Fools’ night. My intended is to be dressed à la sweet Anne Page, and I am to be the Master Fenton of the evening. Now, as we’re pretty much the same height—”

“So, Master Syd, you want *me* to impersonate your mischievous self. Faith, have you any other commands to lay on me?”

“No; but you know as it is All Fools,” said the arch-plotter, persuasively, “no harm will be done, and you will be saving me from perdition.”

“Humph, I cannot see my way very clearly yet.”

“My dear Saint, you never can see anything. I will endeavour to explain, though. With a moustache, wig, dress, and mask covering three-parts of your face you may well pass for me. Meanwhile, I shall escape, for I have forgotten to tell you that since I’ve been engaged, my mother’s eagle-eye

has been fixed on me unflinchingly. And I can't go out but she asks where to, and wheedles round to accompany me. I daren't tell her I hate the Montbron, else she'll be round on me for flopping down on my knees to her and kissing her hand."

I urged that the consequences might be disastrous did I venture to assist him as he desired, besides being an act of unwarrantable impertinence on my part to impersonate Mdlle. de Montbron's affianced lover and my Lady Stapleton's son.

" You know that my mother, in the main, is an extremely good-humoured woman, and likes a joke more than anything," remarked Sydney ; " so you might do me this one favour without hurting yourself in the least."

" *Nemo mortalium omnibus horis sapit.*" This is how I must excuse myself. Sydney so earnestly implored me to make a great fool of myself " for this once," that I yielded to his entreaties, with many misgivings in my mind, and consented to his plans.

CHAPTER XV.

MDLLE. DE MONTRON was the first to salute Sydney on the night of the “All Fools’” ball.

“So you are come,” she said, pouting her lip and flirting her fan nervously to and fro. “I assure you that I’ll do as I promised, and tell them all that I hate you; that I am forced to accept you as my future husband; that I dislike you more than—than—death itself!” she added, with passionate earnestness; “and that they must drag me to the altar, for I will not go calmly with you.”

“Sweet Hilaria,” whispered Sydney, “will nothing induce you to *alter* your cruel resolutions?”

“You despicable creature! Were you indeed a man you would have more honour

in your contemptible heart than to trifle with an earnest woman.” Her bright black eyes seemed to emit sparks of fire as she spoke in an impotent wrath. “ You told me yourself that you hated me ; I was fool enough to believe you. Thinking I had a gentleman to deal with, and one who spoke the truth,” she pursued bitterly, “ I have done all I could to make you hate me, and till now I thought you did. ‘ Sweet Hilaria,’ indeed ! Perhaps you will end by calling me ‘ darling,’ ‘ sweetheart,’ &c. As you value a clear face, sir, I advise you to keep those epithets to yourself.”

“ At least,” remarked the irrepressible youth, with an insane giggle bordering on the hysterical, “ I shall be possessed then, of some marks of your—”

“ Enough, sir ! ” cried the lady, haughtily, “ your insolence is past all bearing. Pray do not address me further.”

And the Anne Page of the evening left her bewildered Fenton, to lose herself in a crowd of queerly matched couples. Here, Mary Queen of Scots (masked of course) tittered at the witticisms of a bearded bandit, remarkable for the weak tendency of

his legs. Faithful Rizzio, unconscious of his impending fate, walked arm-in-arm with a flower girl, and paid not the slightest heed to his royal mistress, who nevertheless did not even seem to notice her musician's perfidy. Harry the bluff, with usual heartlessness, was bent on admiring the fair tresses of a smiling Ophelia. Hamlet himself, far from soliloquising morosely, chatted most amicably to a gipsy--no doubt with a view of knowing his future. There were troubadours, devils, fools, kings, queens, milkmaids, all jumbled together in an unassorted mass that would have done a communist's heart good to see. There was a rustle of silks, a jangle of bells, a patter of feet, a clatter of tongues, a glittering of gems and jewels, a sound of laughter continuous; but the sparkle of bright eyes, and smiles on pretty lips, to Sydney's mind were worth all the coruscations and scintillations of costly apparel in the world. So he looked with undisguised pleasure on the scene. The contemplation of so much laughter and merriment led him unconsciously into a serious train of thought. Were these men and women really as careless and joyous as

they looked ? Did the rippling laughter flow from the heart as well as the lip ? Did those feet, besides tripping a gay measure to the sounds of music, dance as well to the music of a contented mind and quiet conscience ? Were the hearts of these fantastically attired beings masked like their faces ? Was it all as gay within as without ? Ah me ! Ah me ! who shall say ? Miss yonder, seemingly enwrapped in the conversation of a young spark of sixty or thereabouts, Sydney observed, often cast long side-glances at a Charles II., seated not far from her, with another charmer by his side. The glances appeared to be reproachful, yet she smiled. O, how that poor little heart suffered to see her Charles's perfidy ! Talk of martyrs who have died at the stake ! talk of *their* saintlike heroism ! Bah, I know better. Society's martyrs are ten thousand times more to be pitied. What are the ancient worthies' sufferings of brief duration, to the prolonged bitterness, innumerable pangs and disappointments of an upholder of Society's laws and Fashion's freaks ? Nobody thinks of canonising my Lady Follifolower. Nobody thinks of paying respectful visits to *her* shrine

though she died for her faith, viz., Society, god ; Fashion, his prophet ! Nobody worships at *her* tomb. And yet this woman, and her six plain daughters—plain, and almost portionless, mind—served their god with a zeal and devotion that was perfectly sublime. Her ladyship chaperoned her six gawks to balls, when she was dead tired, and with a throbbing head, painful and aching, managed somehow to grin cheerfully on each young fellow who asked the honour of one of her daughter's hands—for a dance. What a weary time it must have been for her to get Jane, Maria, Sara, Matilda, Anne, and Rose off her hands. What nights of lying awake wondering if young Smith “meant anything.” What a peaceless, dreary period, full of snares and pitfalls it must have been. No, your ladyship, even when I do see your elegantly equipped coach in the Mall, I envy neither *you* nor yours. That grinning baboon of a nigger behind your carriage, I always take to be black care, despite his gorgeous raiment of purple, gold, and fine linen.

“ But to what does all this lead ? ” the polite reader, courteously elevating his eyebrows, rather *looks* than asks. “ What on

earth *does* he want?" Only your patience, gentle peruser (it is a curious fact to note how obsequious we gentlemen of the quill are to our victims, especially so when most we torture them), only your patience, and —

Sydney was awakened from a lengthened train of soliloquy in thought, partaking, too, somewhat of the nature of slumber, by a man's hand being laid on his shoulder. Up he started.

"I beg your pardon," said the stranger, who was neither masked nor dressed in fancy costume, "but have I the honour of addressing the Viscount Sydney Stapleton?"

The dreamer awakened, bowed, and further intimated that he had not the honour of being acquainted with the gentleman.

This conversation took place in a nook of the great room where the giddier portion of the crowd did not penetrate.

"No," said the stranger, with a courteous smile, showing a glistening row of very white teeth, "perhaps not; in fact I *am* a stranger to you, though I have the pleasure of being perfectly well acquainted with your mother."

Sydney wondered what on earth his mother

had to do with the present conversation, but said nothing.

" You are wondering, doubtless," pursued the stranger, " why an old fogey like I am disturbing you in the midst of —"

" Slumber, I assure you," interposed the other, with a smile.

" Slumber, then—since you will have it so," observed the stranger, as if it cost him an effort, so polite and courteous was he, unwilling even to insinuate such a thing. " But I was told that a gentleman of the name of Steyneville—Harold Steyneville, was to be here to-night. I have looked for him in vain."

" Not very unnatural, considering if he were here he would be masked."

" Very true—quite so," assented he of the white teeth. " *Then* I certainly would *not* know him ; but, hearing from my lady Stapleton that you are a particular friend of his, I should feel extremely gratified by your pointing him out to me. You must know," he added, persuasively, " if he is here. Your mother could not tell me."

" If he is here ? " asked Sydney. " Let us go amongst the dancers, and if he is there I shall point him out to you with pleasure."

I need not say the search proved futile, not one among the gay company being Harold. The stranger was, to all appearances, very much disappointed, and showed it so greatly in his looks, that his guide secretly wondered what the unknown wished with his intimate friend.

"He has two cousins, though," remarked Sydney, "one of whom is here; if you wish I could point her out to you."

"No, no—that is, yes—where is she?" asked the stranger, eagerly. "Point her out—take me to her directly, pray."

The young man gazed in mute astonishment at the stranger's impetuosity. Now that he scrutinised him searchingly, there seemed something almost familiar in the lines of his face. The firm, well-shaped, cruel mouth, the dark eyes, the hasty, imperious movements, all tended to confirm the suspicions that he had seen this man somewhere before, and that not long ago. But when and where, the mask could not determine.

"You seem to know them well," said the younger man, slowly.

"They were children—when I last saw them," cried the elder, impatiently. "I beg

of you, sir, to lose no more time, bring them to me or me to them."

"*Them!* There is but one."

"One! Tell me which it is! Almyra, is it not? The pretty little Almyra, with golden hair. Ah! she must be a big Almyra now —fair as the sun itself! Yes, yes, show me the beautiful Almyra Marlande," cried the other, earnestly.

"You seem very determined on seeing Almyra Marlande, sir. She is not here. Almyra Marlande," answered the mask, with emphasis, "is no more—"

"No more!" echoed the stranger, hoarsely, not giving him time to continue, and clasping his hands in an agony of anguish across his breast. "Dead! O, God! O, God! The fair, the sweet baby Allie, whom I thought to see in days of prosperity surrounded by every joy and comfort. Who is to blame? Tell me, sir," he said, fiercely, "did she not have care and nursing? Did she die like her mother, friendless and forsaken?"

Strangely moved and horrified by what the stranger said, and the violence of his passion, the Viscount drew him hastily back to the corner they had shortly left. It was done in

time ; curious eyes had already begun to stare, and a few idle tongues were already stilled in contemplating the new object of interest before them.

She was not dead, the Viscount told him, but living, and married to a great and noble man. They were not in England at the present time, but would be so shortly. Would he in the meantime see her sister ?

“ Anne ! what, Anne Marlande ! ” exclaimed the stranger. “ As a child she was a plain, silly, frightened thing, with not one of the graces of her sister, or any winning way ! He would see her some day, but not now. So Allie lived and was married well, and nobly ? Allie was beautiful, Allie was admired, as she should be.” Allie was everything, in short, and her noble, sweet sister was nothing, only the “ plainer of the two,” and frightened. Verily, modesty is fast going out of fashion ! thought the disturbed Sydney.

“ At least,” said the latter, as the stranger moved with a satisfied air towards a door, “ you will let me have the satisfaction of knowing to whom I have had the honour of speaking ? ”

"And with what right he has questioned you so seemingly impertinently," suggested the stranger, "of Almyra—and—her sister? Then, sir, permit me to tell you," with a liberal display of his snowy ivories, "that it is, much as it astonishes you, *with a kinsman's right.*"

With a low bow he left the bewildered mask to his own confused reflections.

* * * * *

"I refuse to accept Viscount Sydney Stapleton either as a betrothed lover or a husband."

Thus, flushed, angry, and haughty, spoke Mdlle. de Montbron, in a clear, ringing accent.

These words, pronounced as they were in a hushed, crowded room, had the desired effect of creating a sensation. Then uprose my Lady Stapleton, like Nemesis, eager to avenge the slight cast on her son.

"Mademoiselle," said she, with eloquent scorn flashing from beneath her black brows, "Mademoiselle, it appears to me that you are taking advantage of to-night—but is this a fitting time I ask you?"

"Fitting or not fitting, I do not wish to accept him."

A fearful silence reigned. Some irreverent persons actually laughed, thinking it to be some masque got up especially for their entertainment ; some took the affair seriously.

"I have told you often enough, Heaven only knows, that I dislike your son, and—now madame, you have it—let him see, and you too, and you, my dear friends and relations, how a persecuted woman can act." Throwing off her mask, she revealed a face, not belonging to Mdlle. de Montbron, but a dear friend of hers. "My Hilary has gone away, and does not intend to return till you are all restored to your senses. So much for your chance of a bride, Viscount," and the mad girl snapped her fingers in his masked face. "And so much for your chance of a daughter-in-law, your ladyship," she added, with a twirl of her fan. "Ha ! ha ! ha ! All Fools' evening has really turned out funnier than I expected. Now, Viscount, on behalf of my dearest Montbron, I ask you," she cried, mischievously, "have you not been tricked finely ? And does it not serve you right ?"

Lady Stapleton groaned in impotent horror.

" You are perfectly correct, miss," said he who was addressed. " But I am delighted to say that in all probability All Fools' night will turn out even queerer and funnier still for your especial delight. Permit me, on behalf of my friend Sydney, Viscount Stapleton, to thank you for the amusement your pretty prank has afforded." And unmasking, the identical features of Harold Steyneville were disclosed to view—seemingly for the especial petrification of the kinsmen's and friends' faces who had urged on the luckless betrothal.

" My friend Sydney has left his maternal roof, and does not intend to return till you are all restored to your senses," I said, laughingly.

Further eloquence on my part was drowned in vociferous and prolonged cheering and applause. It was the cleverest and best acted little one-act comedy people had ever seen, so natural too! And the most excellent point of this was, that all through the evening people had believed that Fenton was Sydney, and Anne Page Mdlle. H. de Montbron. People clapped and clapped again. My Lady Stapleton was so pleased

with me for helping Sydney and thwarting the plans of “that minx,” that she (such is the way of the world) embraced me cordially, calling me a “dear good pleasant creature who had done her a service she could never forget or repay,” &c., &c.

I think my Lady Stapleton is somewhat of a revengeful turn of mind.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHO was the stranger who had addressed me as Sydney? A kinsman, he said, of my kinswomen, therefore a relative of mine. Strange I had never met him before. Who could he be? I pondered. His anxiety, his doubts and fears for the happiness of Almyra, raised a suspicion in my mind that I hardly ventured to think over twice. The more I thought of his face the more I was assured of having seen it, or something very similar, before, and that but recently. As days went on, and formed to weeks, and as weeks went on and formed to months, hearing nothing more of the incognito, the recollection of him faded away, and I commenced to think of him as a figure in a

troubled dream, something substantial for an idle fancy or vision, something shadowy and vague for reality.

Valerian was still staying with us—Annie and I—when after five months' absence from England the Marquis and his wife returned, and invited us to stay for a time at their mansion in Piccadilly. Although we assured Valerian that did he care to prolong his stay we would gladly forego the invitation, he would not hear of it, declaring he had urgent business in London too, which he had delayed to perform long enough. Our not too numerous arrangements being duly made, we bade farewell to our friends, among whom include Birch and Batty, and commenced our journey.

Birch testified little or no emotion at our departure. He was in the act of pruning a tree as I opened the gate for Valerian and Annie to pass through.

"We are going now," said the latter, gently holding out her hand; "good-bye, Birch."

"Goo'-bye, Miss Annie," replied he of the surly countenance, without deigning to look at the hand, and continuing to clip at his tree.

"By-the-bye, Birch, have you any message for Almyra?" I asked.

"Miss Allie!" exclaimed the old gardener, dropping his scissors and gruffness at one and the same time. "Are you goin' to see *her*? O! what a golden, golden time you are going to have of it," he cried, clasping his hands at the thought. "Miss Allie! yes, pray give her any message that a miserable old man like me may send to her, so beautiful and kind. Tell her that the old tree, yonder, under which she used to sit under, and *on* too—ah, many is the time I see her swinging up and down, up and up and down, on one of them boughs—tell her the old tree is pining and dying because she ain't here, and that the flowers and shrubs are all going dead, and all the watering and sun won't do 'em any good whatsoever. And that—"

But the animation died as suddenly as it was born. Observing our surprise at his wordiness, he pursed up his lips, shook his head, picked up his scissors, and began to work most assiduously, and to my expressions of goodwill returned monosyllabic replies.

It was late the same night when our humble coach drew up at the Sansgêne mansion. No sooner were the clatter of carriage wheels heard than the hall door opened and two footmen in rich liveries pounced out, and in an incredibly short space of time had our luggage and our very persons under their control. We were ushered into a sumptuous dining-room, the walls of which were behung with the portraits of the Marquis's defunct and scowling ancestors and smiling ancess-tresses. About old family pictures I have noticed one peculiar fact: whereas the gentlemen invariably appear to have looked on life as a thing to be frowned and "black-browed" at, the ladies, on the contrary, strike even a casual observer's fancy as being particularly pleased with existence, for as much as the gentlemen scowl the ladies smile, and *vice-versâ*. The apartment was lighted by the glow of soft, yellow lamps, and the thick, rich carpeting gave back no single sound of a footprint. At the further end of the room, reclining on a couch, was a white-robed figure. By her side was a book, which looked as if it had just fallen from the sleeper's hands. She had not heard us enter, but

slept on. No one else was here, and so not doubting it to be my kinswoman, I left Annie and stole on tiptoe to her side. It was Almyra. I softly raised her white hand, glittering with her spouse's presents, and carried it to my lips, reverently and sadly. It was a strange meeting; was this her welcome after having so warmly invited us? But I could not blame her, for as I looked into her beautiful, sleeping face, there was an awful expression of weariness on each feature. I had already laid her hand down again, when her lips moved, and her eyes half unclosed themselves.

What was it I heard the lips utter? Was it fancy or reality? The mouth appeared to have said, with a wonderful smile, "Aling-dale," as if in her mind's eye she saw him. Then I thanked Heaven it was only I who had heard the name. She started up immediately after, and perceiving who I was, kissed me without more ado, and flew to the arms of her sister.

She was so pleased to see the dear old country folk again, she said, and while she chattered to them they must sit down and refresh themselves.

She was a very gay personage now and went to plays, drums, parties and cards every evening. Enjoyed herself "*Que voulez-vous*; it's better than old Steyneville Hall at all hazards." Did she like travelling? "One must travel to see something of the world. Did not object to it, but preferred London to any city she had visited. Rome, Naples, Venice, Florence, all very beautiful; but one can't sit looking at the blue sea, mountains and sky all the day. Very well at first, but after a while becomes ennuyeux. Do have some more pheasant, Hal?"

"No more thanks, Almyra."

"A little more wine, then?"

"I have eaten and drunk sufficiently; but, will you do me a favour?"

"Anything. Annie, dear child, you are quite pale."

"Will you stand up near the light and let me see how you look?"

"Certainly; you curious book-worm, you," laughingly. "Look! Have I changed at all?"

She took one of the lamps in her hands and rose from her chair.

The ladies on the wall still smiled, the cavaliers still frowned on their canvasses.

O, had they been real, I thought, had they but been real, their expressions would surely have been altered. The dames would have foregone their self-satisfied smirks in beholding this creature, so young and beautiful outshine them. I cannot believe that the hard-heartedest, severest old Puritan, with the longest paragraph of a name, could have remained an impassable spectator of so rare a loveliness. What, whom did she resemble as she stood there in her shimmering satin dress trailing a couple of yards behind her—with one hand holding the lamp uplifted, the light of which cast a gleam like that of a sunbeam on her face and unbound hair, in which glittered a frosty diamond star? What and whom did she resemble when motionless as a statue, and with a strange smile on her lips, half pride and half contempt for her own person, she looked into the smirking face of Mary de Sansgêne above her? Neither Annie nor I could repress an involuntary exclamation. She put down the lamp hastily. “Well,” she demanded, “are you satisfied? You should say something pretty now, Hal, since you are in town. All men do here. Why, bless you, my dear innocents, do you know if

I believed only one moiety of what had been said to me I would be half angel — ”

“ And half — ? ”

“ Devil ! ” she laughed, in her old fearless manner.

She had not once mentioned her husband’s name; when I asked after him she touched a silver bell and a servant immediately appeared.

“ Is my lord in ? ” she asked, carelessly, not even looking in the servant’s direction.

“ I beg your pardon, my lady,” said the man, coming nearer to the light and looking at his mistress earnestly, I do not know why, but it seemed to me at the time as if the servant had heard distinctly what she said, but as an excuse to speak and look at her, had feigned not to have caught her words.

“ Is my lord in, at home ? ” she repeated, in a louder voice, again without deigning to cast a glance at him.

“ My lord is in the library, I believe, madame.”

“ Then tell him, if he is not particularly engaged, I should like to see him. No, no ; stay, rather tell him that our visitors have arrived and are waiting his good pleasure,”

she added, turning to me, repeating the last words in a kind of quiet disdain.

The man bowed respectfully, and casting a stealthy glance at Annie and I, disappeared.

Obedient to his wife's summons the Marquis presently appeared, carrying a book under his arm, and the well-known snuff-box in his hand. He seemed pleased to see us in his grandly polite way, and greeted me almost cordially.

After a great many courteous inquiries and answers had been made and given, Almyra and Annie left us, the door having previously been opened by the master of the house, who bowed as they went out.

I wondered to myself if the stately gentleman's nerves had ever been shocked by my kinswoman's forcible way of expressing her opinions at times. But my wonder soon subsided. There are many, many things which beauty may venture to say and do which plainness dare not even think of. Beauty has a privilege, plainness has not. Besides which the Marquis de Sansgêne looked on his wife as a superior being. Indeed had she not been so, as everyone knows, he never would have been a King Cophetua.

The Marquis was not the sort of man to be enchanted by every woman's *beaux-yeux*. Otherwise he could not have remained an eligible bachelor for fifty odd years. As a young man, he did not say of every woman he met, "A perfect Venus, by Jove, my dear fellow ;" as an old one, he was still more discreet, till he married the "Modern Aphrodite," as the beautiful Miss Marlande was called. He had watched the rise and fall of many queens of the hour. There was one short story afloat at the Kit-Cat descriptive of his excessive fastidiousness. It was said that after each gentleman had filled his glass at the club, and drunk it to the present toast's health, and my Lord Marquis was called upon, he would invariably answer, raising his goblet, "To the next toast," thereby intimating that he was dissatisfied with the personal or mental attractions of the then reigning one. When he had seen Miss Marlande at Her Majesty's reception for the first time, he drained a bumper to the health of a reigning beauty. To the unmitigated surprise of the ancient members, when his detractors heard of the betrothal, they shrugged their shoulders, and quoted a part of a chapter of the Bible, be-

ginning, “King David being stricken in years,” etc. But then people are so malicious at times, and we all know that “*Ne Jupiter quidem omnibus placet.*” And surely my Lord Marquis, being of lesser rank, could not reasonably be exempted from calumny and slander. But to return. When the door had closed on the two ladies, the Marquis laid down his book, and took a seat opposite me, nursing his snuff-box. As I looked at him, so trim, clean, and finely dressed, I was seized with a sudden apprehension of my own dustiness, for I had not yet washed the travelling stains off my face and hands. I glanced into the mirror opposite, a great, awful, truthful mirror, that showed me in no favourable light compared to my host, and became red-hot at my own image. But he, seemingly unconscious of my discomfort, commenced a conversation in the following manner, first crossing his well-shaped, silk-stockinged limbs one over the other, and, as his wont, laying the palm of the right hand crossways on the left, over the snuff-box, thus bringing his delicately-tinted, almond-shaped nails to bear a sort of languid approbation from his eyes.

CHAPTER XVII.

“I do not know,” he said, as if it were a subject of vast importance, “what your favourite wine is, but I really should like you to enlighten me on this point?”

Although I assured him that it was immaterial to me what kind of wine I drank as long as it was good, he shook his head in courteous disbelief, and rang the bell.

“Now,” said he, as the same servant as before answered the summons, “will you be good enough to order what you please?”

I wished at the time that he had not been quite so ceremonious, for although at my ease, I felt far from being at home in his society, so at a venture I said Burgundy.

When the servant left on his errand I breathed a positive sigh of relief for having found a topic to break the ice with.

"That servant of yours has a decidedly handsome face," said I, "and his manners, appearance, and speech are really quite out of the common. May I ask if he has been long with you?"

"Do you mean Stanford?" asked my host, slightly elevating his eyebrows. "Yes, many people have remarked him, he *is* a superior sort of man, and not so uninformed and ignorant as the rest—of his species. He is also very discreet, and I consider him a—ah—highly meritorious person, and one whom, were I disposed to part with, I should have no fear of recommending to anyone, you know."

Just then the object of his encomiums re-entered with the wine, hindering, for the present at all events, all further conversation on the subject. He was on the point of leaving the room again when his master called out to him—

"Stay," he said quietly; "come here, please."

The servant, with an anxious look, approached. There was nothing servile or cringing in his step; he stood in a deferential attitude, it is true, but it might have been the

position of a young man listening to the advice or counsel of an old one, respectful only, anything but meanly submissive.

“ Stanford,” said the older man, eyeing him intently, and at the same time feigning to be engrossed with the manifold perfections of his finger nails, “ Stanford, when I entered my room somewhat unexpectedly last night, I found something belonging to you on the floor.”

“ I beg your pardon, my lord ; I don’t think I’ve missed anything of mine,” stammered the other, breathing more freely though.

“ No ? Think again ; if not yours, to whom does the book I found on my bedroom floor as if dropped — ”

“ O, my ‘ Eneid ! ’ ” exclaimed the footman, turning pale, and clapping a pair of very white hands to his coat pockets.

“ I thought so,” returned the Marquis, in a tone of moral reproof at the man’s hasty ejaculation ; “ you should take more care. I found ‘ Stanford ’ written on the fly-leaf, and as I know none other of the name, concluded it to be yours. Take it away, and for the future pray be more careful.”

Dismissed with the admonition, the young

man took his book from the table, and his leave immediately afterwards.

“ This is a very peculiar character,” he said, calmly. “ What a man in this station of life requires with Mr. Dryden’s translation of Publius Vergilius Maro’s ‘ Eneid,’ I cannot conceive. Incongruities will never cease. Society is completely revolutionised now. In my younger days, Mr. Steyneville, I positively assure you that anything of so preposterous a nature would have excited no little amount of indignation.”

“ Indeed, your lordship,” I answered, significantly, “ Rousseau has argued the equality of man so well in his ‘ Heloise,’ that it would be foolish on my part to attempt to better it. However, I would —”

“ You would like to repeat the old truism that all men are equal,” observed the Marquis, with immovable courtesy, stroking the lid of the snuff-box as if it were a living thing. “ That is all very well said. We have modern ranters who proclaim mankind composed of the same flesh and blood, the same understanding, and the same—everything, in short. Apart from Monsieur Rousseau’s ‘ la Nouvelle Heloise,’ being to my mind, *mine*, a

painfully offensive imitation of Richardson's 'Clarissa Harlowe,' he speaks in positively disgusting terms of liberty and equality. Equality! ma foi! There are race-horses and cart-horses, gentlemen and labourers. Set a cart-horse on a racecourse in competition in point of beauty, speed, and nobility, with a racehorse, and see who will bear off the palm! Again, take a vulgar rustic and a man of gentle birth, and set them both to write a poem. These rhodomontades on Equality are only tricks to catch the '*οὐ πολλοί.*' As for Monsieur Jaques's notions on Liberty, I fancy he would have us live like beasts of the wood. Very poetical, I grant you, but highly impracticable and savage. I prefer this," he added, simply, in conclusion, turning his head round to a host of untarnished but highly varnished set of ancestors on the wall.

I dare say he did prefer "this;" in his place I should have done the same.

" You say," said I, " that you consider Rousseau's ' Heloise,' like ' Clarissa ;' in what way, and where do you find the similarity between these two books ? "

" In the characters, not in the plot," cor-

rected the Marquis, suavely, “I find a great likeness. The friendship existing between Miss Howe and ‘Clarissa’ we have repeated in that of Heloise, and Clare St. Orbe. Clare St. Orbe and Heloise are copies, whether wilful or accidental I cannot determine, of Richardson’s sprightly and sweetly dignified heroines. In St. Preux we have another kind of Lovelace; in my Lord Edward we have another Belford; in the parents of Heloise we already have had those of Clarissa, and so on. The reading of ‘Heloise’ is like,” concluded my host, hitting on a happy illustration, “is like looking into a mirror in a disguise; you see the reflection of yourself in another dress, but it is yourself always despite the difference of habit.”

The next morning, on coming down to breakfast, I was agreeably surprised to find two of my friends in waiting for me—a human and a canine one. The human was the Abbé Chatronière, the canine Marc Antony, who recognised me with a joyous bark.

As the ladies had not yet come down, and the Marquis had gone out for his usual morning’s ride, the Abbé told me how he came to

be beneath the Marquis's roof, and in what capacity.

"You see, my brave old one," he said, putting his head on one side, and looking at me with an approving smile, "you see when my Ladi Norton's soul went to Heaven" (he became suddenly grave and crossed himself reverently) "I was left widout any worldly goods whatever. Dere was no will left, oderwise not for one minute do I doubt but dat de dear lady would have provided for me. I became, helped by mi Lore Alingdale, who, dough a Giaour, hath a noble, good heart, tutor to the eldest son of a rich gentleman. Well, we went to Rome and everywhere; suddenly de eldest son of the rich gentleman elopes with the woman, and leaves me comme on dit en Englais dans le 'lurche.' I come back to England and see de father of de bad young man, and say to him his son is disappeared. He blames me, who am innocent as de child unborn, and says I am all that is wicked. Entre nous," said the little divine, in parenthesis, "I tink someting should be annexed to de decalogue. De second commandment says, 'and de sins of de fathers shall be visited on de children.'

There should be also added, ‘and de sins of de children shall be visited on der tutors.’ For it is wonderful what fathers expect from men who teach their children. I ask, like de great Bacon, What would men have? Do dey tink dose they employ and deal with are saints? Beside, I did my duty; I could not do more. In doing my duty,” murmured he of the black gown, pathetically, “I lost my bread. De father of de young man not only execrated me, but did not pay, and indeed, mon ami, I would have starved, had not appeared in good time an angel!”

“With a star!—a diamond one!” I said, a little grimly.

“Ha! yes! you are turned more cynical apropos, why is that? Never mind, the beautiful Marquise made me her chaplain (having seen me first, I can assure you, in a most deplorable state) and here I am.”

“And here we all are,” laughed my kinswoman, entering in time to hear the last few words. She led in Annie by the hand, who looked very well in one of her sister’s dresses.

“There, now!” cried she, after the customary morning’s salutations, “there, now! what d’ye think of Annie in her new dress?”

"Fine feathers have made a very fine bird," said I.

"Humph! I suppose you think like I do, cousin," remarked the lady, with a side look at the mirror.

"And what does the Marquise tink?" asked the Abbé, folding his fat little palms together, and looking questioningly into his patroness's face.

"She thinks," answered she, with a stately smile, "she thinks that there's more credit due to a woman in poor circumstances looking well, and being dressed in good taste, than in a rich one's being so."

"Why?"

"Why! The rich woman has a couple of maids to plaster her face, hair, and *air* too, if you will; dressmakers, staymakers, etc., so if she appears in public to universal admiration, she does not deserve it. Whereas on the other hand, the woman that is well dressed and good-looking, without being wealthy enough to support an attendant sprite to beautify her, should be praised, for her appearance is her own work, not another's."

"Ah, oui!" cried the Abbé. "Palmam qui meriut ferat —"

"Since the Marquis has not returned," observed Almyra, cutting the Abbé short most unceremoniously, "from his ride, and the breakfast hour is striking, we will sit down without him."

His lordship came in ten minutes later and apologised quite sincerely for not appearing sooner. Subsequently it transpired that he had been thrown from his horse, but rather than disturb the company and his wife by the recital of his accident, he took his seat quite calmly at table as if nothing had happened. In the breast of that man, so courteous—so profoundly, so distressingly polite, must have beaten one of the finest hearts in Christendom. Fine, I say, and one of an ideal *gentleman*. Curiously enough, after breakfast, when we had risen, and were proceeding to leave the room, the Marquis still remained sitting.

"Something must be the matter," whispered the Marquise to me in the hall. Annie and the Abbé had already disappeared downstairs chatting of old times. "He always leaves the table when we do. Come back with me; I do not care to go alone."

We re-entered the breakfast-room, and found the Marquis with his head buried in his hands.

"Are you suffering?" She touched him lightly on the shoulder, and he looked up.

Suffering! He thanked her, but from what should he be suffering? He had not complained. He begged her not to disquiet herself. He was in perfect health. Never better in fact, only he had hurt his foot. But it was nothing, really nothing to speak of; and would be greatly obliged if she would send Stanford to him, through the medium of a superior menial. Mr. Steyneville, if he was not troubling him too much, he would like to have remain.

My cousin swept from the room, with a slight shrug of the shoulders, and without looking once back at either of us.

Stanford knocked presently, and entered.

"Please help me to my bedroom," he said to the servant. "I fell off Jupiter this morning and have sprained my ankle—severely I think. Do not say anything to her ladyship about it. It is not worth while. Mr. Steyneville, will you follow me, please."

CHAPTER XVIII.

No groan or sigh of impatience or pain escaped the injured nobleman, as the family doctor with many expressions of sympathy bound up his foot. It was greatly swollen, and the sufferings he bore so uncomplainingly must have been intense. His only wish was that his wife should not know of it; it would distress her unnecessarily, he said. Ah me, as the noble gentleman lay there, suffering acutely, yet so thoughtful of *her*, I could not help wondering if she deserved it—or did she know of the accident, would she have cared much? I did not think so.

She came up to his room about twice in a day; each time he assured her he felt better, and that he thought he would be able to come down to dinner. He begged her to pay her

usual visits, to ride and drive in the park, and not to allow his slight indisposition to interfere with any amusement she had planned. She offered to read to him in a sort of sullen kindness. He would not hear of it. It was all the same to her; her apathy and indifference towards her husband appeared wonderfully apparent even to me, who was perfectly well aware that milady was never too demonstrative in her affections. He never noticed it. Sometimes he remarked in well-bred surprise how fond the Marquise was of her beautiful dog, but this was all. His wife was above suspicion, and if it so happened that Portia took to caressing an animal, why, it was only natural that Cæsar should treat it with something like respect too.

During his fortnight's indisposition, I read and talked to him for about five hours every day. Indeed he seemed to have taken quite a fancy to me. I was glad of this, for despite his wealth and position, he seemed as lonely and friendless as a man could possibly be.

I did not call the hundreds of visitors who daily blocked the hall passages, to inquire

after his health, friends, I think that not a few men among them were already speculating on his death, and their subsequent marriage with his widow. Be this how it may, I believe the Marquis had really began to like me, and as he treated me with the greatest kindness and consideration, I could not resist the feeling from becoming reciprocal. One evening, the night before he came down stairs again, Stanford entered and begged to say that his mistress would be pleased to see me for a minute or so; would I go into the drawing-room? Now, as I was engaged in reading "*The Midsummer Night's Dream*" aloud to the Marquis, I saw a shade of disapprobation pass over his face at the interruption.

"I am very sorry," said he; "you had better shut the book then, Mr. Steyneville, and go down."

"Had I not better finish the scene?" I asked. "There are only three more pages."

"My lady said she wished to see you immediately, sir; with my lord's permission," said the servant, significantly, turning to me.

"I regret it, but must have the pleasure

of hearing you finish the play some other time," observed the Marquis, politely, but tapping his snuff-box regretfully. "Place the book on the cabinet, Stanford. Good-night, Mr. Steyneville. I daresay by the time you come up again I shall be asleep."

"My lady said she only wanted the gentleman for a little while," remarked Stanford, respectfully.

"True," said the Marquis. "Then replace the book, and I shall wait."

I left the room. The last I saw of Stanford was this: He had taken up the Shakespeare, and whilst I was speaking to his master rapidly turned over the leaves till he came to the place where I had left off, and then he advanced with the book open, and his finger on the middle of the page. I was too curious to know for what purpose my cousin so urgently needed me to take much notice of the fact at the time. Afterwards I recollect ed it.

When I had put my foot on the last step, Almyra was in waiting for me.

"Come on, Harold!" she said with a smile. "We have a few visitors in the drawing-room; one in particular is your

especial friend, who is very desirous of seeing you."

"I can't go amongst a set of strangers like this," I expostulated; "I have not even had time to dress for dinner."

"Ah! bah!" exclaimed madame, with supreme contempt; "besides, beauty unadorned— You know the rest."

"Come," said I, unable to forbear a smile, "does this look like it?" I lightly touched the glittering gems upon her neck and wrist. She shrugged her shoulders. Those shoulders, those beautiful round white shoulders, had been too much at that kind of work lately, and I was pained to see the scornful indifference which prompted her to use them thus. Just then Marc, who had been whining in the drawing-room at the protracted absence of his mistress, succeeded in his hitherto futile attempts to follow her, and with a joyful yelp ran out and sat down on the rug on which she stood, thumping his tail up and down in an excess of canine delight. He graciously permitted me to pat his great head, looking at me with honest, confiding eyes as I did so.

"By-the-bye," observed my kinswoman

casually, “have you heard anything of—of his master—at least, his former master ?”

“My lord ?” I asked.

“Yes, yes,” she cried eagerly, “who else should I mean ? Is he well and—and happy ?” she faltered, bending her beautiful head over that of her faithful friend.

“No, I have not heard of him,” I returned gravely. “Happy ! Almyra, do *you* ask that ?”

“Why not ?” she demanded, turning almost fiercely upon me. “Why should I not ask, pray ? Would you still have me believe that my lord offered himself to me for ‘love’ ” (O, that contemptuous emphasis !) “and not for pity ?”

“Cousin,” said I, gently, “it would be useless now to convince you that his affection *was* sincere ; that his word was true, that you wilfully misunderstood him.”

“Hush ! Harold, for God’s sake be still ! Don’t say another word. I cannot bear it. I loved—” She covered her face with her hands, and Marc, by her side, showed his sympathy by giving vent to a mournful howl.

“What ! You love him, too, then ?” I

whispered, horror-struck as the truth dawned upon me. "And you have married and deceived that noble gentleman above stairs. O, Almyra, Almyra," I groaned, "how could you?"

"I will *not* be preached at!" exclaimed the Marquise. "Deceived! who on earth said I deceived! When I married that 'noble gentleman above stairs,' I did not say I loved him. He never asked that of me. Besides, who told you that my affections had been grafted on that libertine of a Lord Halifax? Not I! So—don't stand like that—but come in the room; I really don't know what my visitors will say," she said pettishly.

She drew me into the drawing-room, and before I was two minutes in my chair, and in conversation with my Lady Follifolower. Almyra, who had left me on my entrance, came up, leading by the hand the flame of my boyhood's days, and the aversion of my riper years, Mdlle. Hilary de Montbron.

"This is my surprise for you," whispered the Marquise, "and I am determined that you shall marry somebody rich. This lady is so. I heard all about that prank of yours in connection with Sydney, and admire you

for it. Now do your best, and be gallant. For Heaven's sake don't play the country parson, for the woman in a mercenary sense is worth winning. Look opposite; that's the Bishop of L—. I have set him down as a good match for Annie. She must marry a clergyman—and a rich one! If you don't take advantage of your introductions into good society, I cannot help you. With your appearance and learning, cousin, you must do something that will not disgrace your name and mine."

Did she mean all this? Was she really so callous, and wealth-loving? Was she really so attached to that society of which she was the queen? We shall see.

While my kinswoman whispered, Mdlle. de Montbron stood hard by, flirting her fan up and down. No sooner had Almyra moved away, with a chilling, majestic grace, than Mademoiselle coolly took the seat next to me, and began an open siege.

I felt like a puppy, and was exceedingly uncomfortable. She commenced by asking in a low voice if I remembered those happy, happy times when I was a boy and she a simple girl (I perfectly recollect her to have

been a woman when I was but a lad) and when I had loved her. She had never ceased to love me since, but women were always true, always faithful; men fickle, and changeable as the wind. I said I did not know much about that, for I considered men and women very much alike in that respect. She shook her head, heaved a deep sigh, cast her eyes down to the ground, brought them up again to a level to mine, and finally observed that the world had changed me.

“The world and Time changes most of us,” I said, “some for the better and some for the worse.”

“To which latter class I belong,” remarked the lady angler, as if regretfully.

To which I replied, “Not at all,” being very much confused at the time. My own mind reproached me for this lame compliment, and my cousin, who was standing in feigned conversation with one of her husband’s kinswomen, Lady Belle Vallance, but in reality listening to us, frowned, and completely froze any qualification of the inane repartee I had made.

O, how ardently I wished the whole room and its gay company anywhere but near me.

How I wished the lady by my side had chosen another brook to angle in, and not mine. Her bait was too gross to be tempting ; it wriggled and twisted and twirled to no purpose, the fish on the contrary being more scared than tempted.

She wished to be taken into a conservatory ; the room was too warm. I was forced to offer my arm, and snigger as if delighted with the proposal. As I passed out I caught Annie's glance. Why did she glance so reproachfully at me with her gentle eyes ? What had I done, what was I doing, to cause a look of pain there ?

"What a beautiful evening," observed Mademoiselle, tenderly, when we had come out of the heated apartment. "Do you know, Mr. Harold, I love to look at the moon and stars ; there is something so purely peaceful about them, something so unlike the turmoil and harshness of our life below."

"Yes?" I could think of nothing cleverer, but I put a great deal of expression in the monosyllable, so perhaps it answered the purpose as well as if it had been a most witty and erudite response.

"Yes," repeated the lady. "Look at those

two bright stars yonder. I always think they are mine, from a child I have thought them so; and curiously enough look upon them as my own property now."

" You have reason," I answered gallantly; "judging by their lustre and beauty, they appear to be reflectives of the eyes that glance up at them." I congratulated myself on having said something not so very bad for a beginner.

Mademoiselle raised her eyebrows, rewarding my endeavours with a smile and a curtsey.

After that there was an awful pause. Truly I was in an awkward, unenviable position. Here was a lady for whom I had not the slightest affection waiting to be made love to by me; it was more than an awkward situation—it was a frightful one. I could not speak to her as an acquaintance, that was too frigid. I could not converse with her as a friend, that was too warm, so "what the d—l *am* I to do?" groaned my spirit within me.

" Are you fond of flowers?" asked the lady, at length.

“ O, exceedingly ! ” answered I, delighted beyond measure at having something to say.

“ Do you like carnations ? ”

“ I consider their fragrance to be simply delicious, and their shape beauty itself,” I replied, hypocritically enthusiastic —

“ Jonquils, *carnations*, pinks, and tulips rise,
And in gay confusion charm our eyes.”

“ Then, since you are so fond of carnations —see I have some in my hair,” murmured miss, bashfully.

“ So I perceive ; and they look so pretty that it is a pity to disturb 'em,” I observed, cautiously.

“ O, have no fear—take one. Do, to please me,” she said, tenderly.

“ Indeed, madame,” said I, hesitatingly, “ I'm so unused to touching ladies' hair, that I am afraid my clumsy fingers would disarrange the—the structure— ”

“ Do you think I would heed so slight a thing ? ” she asked, reproachfully.

Heed so slight a thing, eh ? The second time I had seen her during my kind mistress's lifetime she was seated at table, and Hilbert at dessert accidentally let fall a small plum from a dish on her head. It did not

hurt her, or spoil her coiffure in the least, yet she was dreadfully put about and angry with the poor fellow, and said she didn't want that clumsy creature at the back of her chair again. I remembered this small incident because of the curious sequel attached to it. I distinctly recollect hearing my Lord Alingdale, who was *vis-à-vis* to the fair Montbron, say that Hilbert was a d—d bungler, and afterwards reward the man with a gold piece.

What could I do? She bent her head forward, and my trembling fingers were about to ravish one from her dark tresses when, Heaven be thanked, I heard approaching steps and warned my companion in time, led her back to the drawing-room, where, making some blundering excuses, I left her.

Wondering if my lord was still awake, I noiselessly ascended the stairs, and, laying my hand on the handle of his bedroom door, opened it softly and entered. There was someone else seated in my place by his side —there was someone else reading aloud from the same book which I had been reading. Reading, I say, not only clearly and fluently,

but in a low, thrilling, impassioned voice that thrilled me to the heart and held me a spell-bound listener, with my hand on the still opened door. I could not move; and I felt no desire to do so. As the rich tones fell from the moving lips, with their varied and wonderful expressions of grief, love, mirth, and scorn, the interest their owner awakened prompted me to step hastily forward with a half-smothered ejaculation of surprise when I found out who it was. Stanford! No more or less, Stanford the servant.

It subsequently appeared that, when I had left the Marquis, Stanford begged permission to continue the play where I had left off. Astonished at the request, and wondering “how far the impudence of the man would lead him,” he consented. And what I already heard was the result.

“He read marvellously well,” I said; “I could not think how he had learned it.”

“What does a fellow in his station require with Shakespeare?” said the nobleman, raising himself on his pillows and tapping his perennial snuff-box. “That little knowledge only makes him discontented with

his lot and rife for rebellion against his superiors."

I could not endorse that opinion.

"But it does," said the Marquis, emphatically. "With poetry out of the question, let us look on the subject from a matter-of-fact point of view. Let us take this fellow, for instance. He is born. Good. He goes to school—reads Shakespeare whilst he should be digging the earth; and thinks he has a soul above potatoes. It is wrong. For a man without wealth, position, patronage, or friends, possessing a limited portion of talent and an unlimited amount of ambition, to attempt to scale the ladder of Fame, is nothing more than a foolhardy waste of precious time. I shall speak against the proposed amendment of education in the poor schools. Contentment is the aim of mankind in life. This system of promoting knowledge in the lower classes (beyond reading and writing) is dangerous to the laudable aim I have mentioned. Decidedly I shall speak against the reform. Good-night, Mr. Steyneville. Take care how you walk."

CHAPTER XIX.

I EXTRACT the following from my Lady Sansgêne's diary :—

“ Oct. — th.—I should be at the pinnacle of joy and contentment now. Were I a good woman I should be ; but I am not. Candidly and honestly, I know there is but very little good in me ; otherwise I should be satisfied. Satisfied ! Is ambition, is love ever satisfied ? Love again ! what right have I to think of it —much less to write it ? No ; I have chosen my path where tenderness, affection, and truth are not ; and I must walk it through to the bitter end.

“ O, should I not be happy in the possession of an honourable gentleman for a husband ? I should be happy in having the wealth of society for which I longed some

few months back at my feet. I should be—I should be. But I am not. I am already weary of the emptiness of everything about me. I already hate the glitter and trumpery pomp of society. I hate it cordially, but could not live now without it. Peace and rest! Never yet was woman's heart so strange to them. Even at Steyneville—that tranquil old place—around which the fields and gardens seemed bathed in a sort of blessed peace, where the rooms of the ancient Hall, in their very stillness, appeared to have been in some former time sanctuaries for saints—even there—where Nature and my own kindred should have taught my wayward, rebellious spirit to be thankful—there my ungrateful heart harboured the thoughts that have led to this—this! a glorious end where men and women join in envying me, where I, the envied, envy them for still having something to envy.

“ My mind and heart are becoming like cold lead within me. Everything before my eyes I could turn to ridicule and contempt; in this—and this only—I find a sort of morbid pleasure and relief. I have said I am weary; my husband annoys and irritates me with

his eternal courtesy and politeness, which I cannot support much longer in silence. Why is he such a pattern? Why is he such a moral precept? If he only swore sometimes like other men, if he only showed himself to be something less than he really is, I should feel more worthy of him. It is my very consciousness of not being his equal that exasperates me; I cannot breathe freely in his presence, yet I say and do all I can to provoke him. It is useless; I might as well attempt to inflame a stone with anger as the Marquis de Sansgêne.

“What did Harold say the other night? ‘That it is too late now to endeavour to convince you of the truth that my Lord Alingdale did love you.’

“Too late—too late! Uselessly now I am beginning to understand that it was not pity—that it might have been—No; I shall not wrong so far the name I now bear to indulge even in thought of the happiness that, but for my worldly suspicions and mistrust, could have been mine. Sentimentalism is not a part of my nature. Now I will write something that is seemingly too real to be entirely pleasant. It may be my fancy. I

hope it is. Otherwise, on some pretext, I will dismiss the cause of my secret anxiety.

“I must pause to laugh as I pen the words ‘secret anxiety,’ for there is no man, woman or child in this world who has hitherto cast a shadow of fear in the mind of Almyra Marlande. Why should I tremble now? I blush with shame to indite the cause of my annoyance as the Lady Sansgêne. It is a servant, an industrious and mysterious servant, Stanford by name. How curious that looks! Almyra Marlande, the admired, caressed and courted of the world, the fair upstart who has braved and conquered the noblest, haughtiest, and best, is affrighted at the approach of—not a leviathan who spits flames—but a footman! A man who reads the ‘Eneid’ to himself like a student, and, if I am to believe my kinsman Steyneville, peruses aloud ‘Midsummer Night’s Dream’ to my husband like an angel! Why should I fear such a man? Nay, I do *not* fear him. I say with Cæsar, ‘that if my name *were* liable to fear, I do not know the man I should avoid so soon as that Stanford.’ He reads much—that looks bad. When he serves I feel that his

eyes are immovably fixed on me. That is worse. I shall discharge him. But for what? Till now, he has been most respectful, most industrious, and in all respects like his master. I must find some pretext for his speedy dismissal.

“Oct. — th.—My head is in a whirl, and my hands are trembling so that I can scarcely hold my pen. Let me collect my wandering thoughts; it will relieve me to write them down here.

“To-day Annie, Lady Belle Vallance, little Jack Vallance and I went out for a drive. The weather being very fine, I told Stanford, who was behind, to bid the coachman drive a little way down Willesden, as I did not wish to go through the crowded thoroughfares where men and women do nothing but stare.

“As I passed through the green lanes, through avenues of great trees, on whose boughs hundreds of birds were singing, I felt, for the first time during my married life, a feeling of thankfulness seize me. All was so beautiful! The most worldly and callous heart could not have been unmoved by the splendour and tranquillity of the

scenes which passed before my eyes. Every now and then small patches of blue sky and long rays of golden sunlight were visible through the closely-grown woven branches and clustering leaves of the trees. Farm-yards, with apple-faced children and feeding chickens, who stayed in their occupation to see us go by, open-eyed and mouthed ; clear, glistening brooks, on whose surface water-lilies spread their snowy leaves ; corn-fields, with the reapers at work, cutting down, like so many humble sweat-browed fates, that which had been their especial care to rear ; wild flowers, unintended by any hand save that of Nature, a hundred times more fragrant and beautiful than all the costly exotics that man ever reared. The influence of all I saw was so great that, in a softening of spirit, I could almost have wept. I believe I would have done so but for the presence of that Vallance, who bears me no goodwill, for all her smiles and protestations of friendship. As we were driving past another farmyard Annie complained of thirst, and Jack, who is a merry, good-hearted little fellow, home for the holidays said —

“‘I’ll prig some of those black cherries growing over the wall for you, if you like.’

“Annie laughingly declined, and the carriage being stopped, she, Lady Vallance, and Jack got out. They went into the farmhouse to get some milk, and I remained in the carriage, not being thirsty. The day being very warm, I gave the coachman some money to get some ale at the tavern over the way. He descended from his box very thankful, and left Stanford in charge of the horses.

“I was alone with the person I almost dreaded. Without looking at him, I felt his eyes were again upon me. I urged that it was an absurd weakness, and, raising my eyes, threw at him an angry glance. I could not reprove him. I could not say, ‘How dare you always be looking at me?’ That would have been the height of absurdity. ‘A cat may look at a king.’

“But this logic altered nothing of the unpleasantness of the situation, so I was resolved on leaving the carriage and joining the others. With that intent I rose and grasped the handle of the door. Divining my intention, Stanford ran to assist me, leaving the two fresh horses to themselves.

One moment more and I sank back into my seat. The horses, taking advantage of their momentary freedom, started off at a mad gallop. I heard shouts and screams, and in an instant all that which appeared to me so clear before was one confused mass. They flew, trees, men, women, children. Objects animate and inanimate seemed rushing into one another! Another two minutes I should be hurled to my death. The mad creatures had taken another direction. Some hundred yards in front of me was a steep hill. They were flying to it!

“I sat in my seat calm and still; it seemed that the wings of approaching death had already cast a cold shadow over me. I feared nothing. Had I possessed the power of crying for help I could not have done so. Indeed, my mind began to wander; not on my present danger, *that* curiously enough seemed something of the *past*. The past it was that rose and presented itself in the present living colours. Now it was my kind benefactress, smiling and petting me as she did in her life; now it was Sydney, Viscount Stapleton reproaching me for loving Lord Alingdale; now it was Annie and my

noble, clever kinsman, telling me an ordinary occurrence ; now it was Colonel George, my dear, good-humoured playfellow, laughing at my childhood's wilfulness ; then the brothers Chapman, my husband, and Marc Antony yelping with delight on the whole. Above the figures of my kin, and hosts of what the world calls friends, seemed the shining, radiant white-robed figure of my dead uncle Steyneville. He stretched out his arms. Oh ! at last, at last, I was to be enfolded in them, and drink with him of the peace I had never known on earth. If that was death, I loved and welcomed it ! Tears of joy filled my eyes. I was rising to his arms to kiss the gentle smile on his lips, to yearn for earth and earth's blessings no more, when two strong hands pulled me back. I struggled, and marked with indescribable anguish that the smile on my sainted kinsman's lips vanished, that he looked sternly upon me—I that was his darling once—and that his arms fell to his sides again ; that he spread his mighty pinions to soar away from me to the regions beyond. ‘ Oh ! who draws me back to earth again ? ’ I cried, bitterly. ‘ Let me go ! Oh, let me follow him ! ’

“In my kinsman’s stead appeared the figure of my Lord Alingdale. He wore a bitterly scornful expression, like he always does when anyone has angered him, and pointed to the face of him whose arms held me back to the cold world.

“It was the answer to my question.

“I opened my eyes. All these forms were but the fevered fancies of a strained mind. A few minutes before I was driving to my death—a frightful, a terrible death. Now I was safe. Somebody had, at the imminent risk of losing his own life, and with a hand and resolution and will of iron, stopped the horses in their mad flight, and with marvellous dexterity had drawn me from the carriage.

“Who was that somebody—who, as I lay in a semi-unconscious state, I could have vowed to have heard call me by every endearing epithet extant, with no earthly or heavenly right? Who was that somebody, when on opening my eyes, I saw watch me with breathless and all-devouring anxiety—whose face was pale and haggard on my account—who dared to kiss my hand for joy? Who was the somebody—my pre-

server, on whose shoulder my head was pillow'd, whose was the first look of thankfulness I met on coming to myself?

“Ah! who should it be but the strange man who has become the bane of my existence, to whom I must be grateful for having dragged me from heaven—not as others say for having so bravely preserved my life at the imminent risk of his own? Who should it be but the Eneid-reader, Stanford?”

CHAPTER XX.

FOR the first time since her marriage, Almyra and I were alone together. She was seated at an embroidery-frame; but only seated, her hands were idle, and her fair face clouded and sullen. Did I say alone? Well, almost, for there was only little Jack Vallance in the room besides; but that young gentleman was engaged in worrying Marc Antony, who regarded his pranks with philosophical indifference, so he would count for nothing. Ever and again the noble head of the sagacious brute turned round to look at his wilful mistress, and if ever eyes looked unutterable love and obedience that dog's did. The expression of my kinswoman's face, as I have said before, was sullen and

clouded—one white hand was tightly clenched on her lap, the other rested idly on the work, her whole pose seemed as one impatient and weary, not only of the magnificent emptiness of the men and things which surrounded her, but of herself.

“Allie,” I said, at last, addressing her by the old familiar name, which I had not used since her marriage, “have you not yet recovered from the effects of the carriage accident? You appear fatigued and ill.”

This conversation took place a week after the casualty.

She started when she heard her little name, and answered that the effects of the accident had passed off long ago, that her nerves had not been particularly shaken (unlike the rest of her sex), and that she was not suffering; on the contrary, that her health and strength were never better than at the present moment. She was a little *enuyée*, perhaps, that was all—with a shrug. She was saving her spirits for the Countess of Morebore’s reception that evening. What made me think she was fatigued and ill?—with an effort.

“Because you look so,” I returned, quietly.

“Look so!” repeated my lady, irritably. “That’s not like a clever man, Harold, to answer thus. One should not judge by appearances.”

“Very true and correct,” I assented; “but this time I must believe in appearances. I am sure they do not belie the feelings—even of your heart, Almyra. Do fingers,” I pointed to the hand on her lap, “clench themselves like that into the tender palm for no cause?”

“Well, then,” she confessed, “I am tired. Do you ask me why? I will answer you plainly. I do not know the reason myself.”

“Shall I tell you?”

“If you can,” she responded, moodily.

“Almyra is neither content nor happy—otherwise she would not be tired,” I answered, gently. “If she would but bend but one iota of her haughty and rebellious spirit—”

“It is too late, cousin! Besides, you speak too much like a good book—for children, you know,” she explained, with a bitter smile. “How do you think this sounds for a lesson-book: Almyra is tired. She is not content and happy. She cannot

bend her rebellious spirit. She is a naughty girl. Not a bit grateful, only very, very impatient."

"To continue the lesson-book style: Is she not sorry?" I asked, sadly. "Would she not have the past over again, and act differently, if she did?"

"No!" with a jarring laugh. "Not a whit! J'y suis j'y reste. Act differently? Ma foi, do you think I would change to be the mistress of Steyneville, by way of example, cousin?" she demanded, scornfully.

"Almyra," I said, humbly, "believe me or not, as you think proper; but I swear that no thought of myself occurred to me when I spoke in reference to the past."

"Always of the past!" she said quickly and wonderingly—"always of me. Why do you ever question me of happiness? If I am content, so much the better; if I am not, so much the worse—either way, it is no fault of yours."

"If I loved you less," I answered, steadily, "your felicity or unhappiness would be a less source of trouble to me."

"You, too!" she exclaimed, despairingly, shrinking from my outstretched hand, and

misunderstanding me, “you, too! But go—go Harold,” she said, hurriedly. “See me no more until that love you have for me has left you, completely and entirely, so you can take me by the hand, and even say, ‘I hate you.’ O, let me know at least there is someone in the world who esteems me at my real worth, so I may feel less a hypocrite—less—what I know myself to be.”

“Hush! hush!” I cried, sorrowfully, whilst the boy stood looking wonderingly on. “You may take my hand with a feeling of security; for Heaven is my witness, that rather than wrong you by one single impure word or thought—rather than this, I would be a senseless block beneath my lady’s feet for her to walk on to her carriage.”

“You said you loved me,” she replied, hesitatingly.

“I shall say so again, and till all life is gone from me. I shall say so again before your husband, your sister, and your friends; for I love you—wilful, heartless as you are—as a brother loves his younger, dear, and fair sister—purely and tenderly. And to see you pained, grieved and listless, so young and beautiful, joined to one who, though well worthy of

love, has it not—whom you do not understand or love, who loves and does not understand you— O, my sister, you who have never known the tender counsel of a watchful mother, be warned in time—only warned—not as one inferior, but as an earnest counsellor may warn his king. Sister, be warned. Since you have chosen your own way, adhere to, and not dishonour, it.”

Her eyes were tearful—from mine the drops had already fallen—but by her mere will they never rolled down the fair cheeks, or damped the cambric in her hand.

“ I will try,” she said, drearily, “ I am tired and impatient in endeavouring to conform to rules and regulations; but I will try for your father’s sake, Harold,” she said, simply, “ and for yours.”

“ Mine ?”

“ Yes, yours—for you, who are very, very like him.”

And she left the room to dress for the Countess’s reception.

“ What were you two jabbering about ?” inquired young Jack Vallance, with schoolboy-like candour. “ You seem awfully cut up. She didn’t though. S’pose she’s been giving

it you hot? What have you been up to? Larks, eh? I tell you we do have prime larks at school. She always laughs about the ones I tell her. Why didn't she laugh at yours? I say, isn't she jolly good-looking. I think her the b-e-au-tifullest lady I've ever seen, though the mater says she's all powder, paint, and pad. I don't believe it."

"No?"

For all my uneasiness, I could not resist smiling at my cousin's rosy little champion.

"You won't sneak if I let you into a secret? No? Well, the day after the mater said that about Almyra—she tells me to call her that because I am a sort of kinsman, you know. Well, as I was telling you, I just wanted to see if it was all powder, paint and pad. So when she bent down to kiss me I just licked her face, and none of it came off. Then I pinched her, and she said 'O!' like you and me would, who aren't padded, you know. So I know the mater's been telling fibs."

Further commendation on the part of Jack was extinguished by the entrance of my lord Marquis, with Lady Vallance on one arm and

Annie on the other, and Lady Belle brought up the rear with the Abbé. All were in full dress.

I was not going with them, having an appointment with Valerian, at Will's coffee-house.

His lordship expressed regret at my being prevented from attending the Countess's reception. He "sincerely deplored the fact," etc. So did not I. He hoped that I would not be engaged for the next, as at her ladyship's room there were always assembled the greatest celebrities of the hour.

"Yes," observed the little Churchman. "Il-y-a à voir les plus grands personnes entre les poetes, orateurs, musiciens, beaux esprits, soldats et enfin patriots--au monde."

"Patriots and patriotism," remarked the Marquis, with a gentle, reproving wave of the glittering, tremulous hand which held the Pompadour snuff-box, "are euphonious designations for the vulgar and vulgarism. A great patriot is a great nuisance. I admire the ruler and government of my country without vaunting it to the world in bombastic stultiloquence. Why should not others do the same I ask?"

“ Because they are not content, my lord,” argued the Abbé.

“ Then they should be. I am a noble, yet I am content, and do not wish to be a prince. Man should be content with his lot, and receive all fortune, good and evil, with an equal mind. He does not make and weave his own destiny. It is Providence—Providence with the gentle, Fate with the ignorant. But here is my lady. We will drop the subject, if you please, gentlemen.”

CHAPTER XXI.

SHE entered, and all eyes instinctively rested on her—not in a glitter and sparkle of jewels, although handsomely dressed, but in a noble simplicity, that became her even better, perhaps. I noticed that there was something less haughty in her gait, something less scornful on her face, and in its place something more subdued and gentle. Of course, no one noticed this change save I. My lord Marquis, consulting the clock on the mantel-piece, declared they had fully an hour to wait, and then be somewhat early.

In the meantime, Lady Belle was in raptures over my kinswoman's toilette. She had never seen her look so well ; “ what exquisite brocade, what beautiful lace, what a ravishing *tout ensemble* ; and, dear me, what lovely

earrings, and a brooch to match; such a peculiarly uncommon design, too. O, do let me see it near, please."

Almyra good-naturedly unfastened the brooch and handed it her. The lady was enthusiastic over it. Where did she get it? A present? Yes? It was indeed a unique treasure. Turning it over and over in her hand, she admired it at all points.

"Ah! here's a name marked on," she said, at length, holding the back of it nearer the light. "Who did you say gave it you?"

"I said I forgot," returned Almyra, quietly.

"Forgot the donor of such a beautiful gift? For shame!" cried the lady, as if laughingly. "Why, my dear child, I can scarcely believe that."

The beautiful face paled ever such a little, and the hand stretched out, almost imploringly I thought, for the brooch again.

"May I look upon the beautiful jewel, madam?" cried the honest Abbé, guessing the truth at once, and doing all in his power to assist his patroness.

I knew what his intentions were, and blessed him for them. If she had passed the

brooch to him, he, after bestowing a cursory glance at it, would have restored it to the possession of the owner.

My Lady Vallance guessed his purpose, and thwarted it. There was a sparkle of malicious delight in her black eyes. She said it was her fixed intention to read the name on the brooch. Nearer the light, and nearer still, she held it, scrutinising it as closely as if it were for dear life. Even the Marquis condescended to look with something very like interest on the proceedings.

“I have it ! I have it !” exclaimed the lady, at last.

Annie, the Abbé, and I looked at each other, although none knew really why; yet in each breast there was something like a presentiment of coming ill.

“It’s Alingdale,” emphasised the former speaker. “As I live, it’s Halifax, seventh Lord of Alingdale !” And as if in ecstasy of unmitigated wonderment, she let fall the brooch, and lifted up her skinny hands.

“Some mistake,” observed the Marquis, drily, picking it up. “Let *me* see.”

“There is no mistake ; it is perfectly correct,” said his young wife, calmly. “He

was a great and good friend to my kinsman here."

"And to *you*, my dear," remarked Lady Vallance, preparing to prick with a poisoned needle.

"Indeed, my lord was good to all of us," cried Miss Annie, joining in with greater warmth than I ever suspected her of having.

"Yes, good to you all—particularly so to your sister," suavely observed the Marquis's kinswoman. "But how should young, innocent creatures like you know what a reputation that man has? Now, I shouldn't wonder"—putting her head on one side like an owl—"if he did not make love to Almyra under cover of doing good to her kinsman. He is an unprincipled wretch; as wicked as he is good-looking."

It was well that a woman had said so. I cried to myself, something like Beatrice in the play, "O, that *she* were a man!" The abuse of my generous protector would not have passed by so easily with impunity.

"So this man gave you the brooch and earrings, my dear Almyra," pursued Lady Vallance, stealthily watching the effects of the communication on her kinsman from the

corners of her eyes. “ Believe me, that man never yet gave a present to a woman without some motive—especially a good-looking one.”

The marquis winced, Annie turned pale, and the little divine rubbed his hands as if he were washing them in an excess of excitement.

“ Indeed,” observed Almyra, with an icy smile; “ you appear to know a vast deal of his lordship’s motives. May I ask, madam, if you speak so positively of them from experience ? ”

In a minute the gentleness of her new manners had vanished, and she appeared again as of yore. Verily, the worldly woman needed no champion to take up the cudgels for her. The quiet, biting sarcasm of her tones, the drooping lids, the raised eyebrows, the corners of the red lips curved downwards, all expressed themselves with what contempt and scorn their possessor regarded the insinuations of Lady Vallance. By-the-way, the trick of curving the lips and raising the eyebrows I had seen on another face, namely, that of Lord Alingdale’s.

“ Madame,” said the Marquis, slowly, to his wife, “ you confess that these jewels are

the presents of—of—Halifax, seventh Lord of Alingdale ?”

The thin lips did not even seem to care to utter the name, so obnoxious and vilified was it to them.

“Confess !” repeated my kinswoman, somewhat haughtily, “that is a strange word, and one only used by priests to sinners, and judges to criminals ! Am I one, my lord ?”

“Well, you acknowledge, then, to have received those things from the peer I have already mentioned ?” courteously and apologetically observed her husband, appearing not to notice the interrogation.

“Most certainly I do. What then ?”

“Then I must beg you, madame, as my wife, never to wear those gems again,” he said, with a bow.

It was the first time he had ever put any restraint upon her actions. The first, and last, command that ever fell from him to exact her obedience, which, although put under the form of an entreaty, bore the stamp of authority, nevertheless. The self-willed woman, so long accustomed to command, so little to submission, resented. The

smouldering revolt in her heart burst into flames as he uttered the injunction ; but it did not break loose *then*—as yet the open fire was restrained—and it burned fiercer for burning internally.

“ I will remember what you said,” she observed, biting her lips to restrain the rising tumult in her heaving breast. “ Do you wish me to take the earrings off now, as well ? You only need say the word ! ”

He did not notice the latent acrimony in her speech. The lady could do as she pleased about that. He did not speak of the present, only the future. She would greatly oblige him by not wearing the diamonds Halifax, seventh Lord of Alingdale, had given. If the design of the jewellery had any particular charm for her, he would have them copied, and some others made in a precisely similar fashion.

“ Of course,” cried Lady Vallance, “ Almyra does not set any value on the brooch and earrings for the *giver’s* sake.”

My Lady Almyra rose, and, unhooking the earrings—the beautiful glittering earrings that became her ears so well—threw them on the floor, and deliberately crushed the

delicate workmanship into a broken mass beneath her heel.

This done, with a composed smile, she said she thought it was time to depart, and rang the bell.

Stanford entered, looking keenly at the surprise depicted on each face, the natural result of my kinswoman's act.

"Are the chairs at the door?" she asked, speaking at him and looking another way.

"Yes, my lady," he answered; "they have been in waiting now above a quarter of an hour."

"Then it's time to start," she said, with a peculiar smile. "Stanford! I have crushed my earrings. When you come to clear the bits away, pray keep them. I have not yet rewarded you for saving my life. They are valuable, and you can get a considerable sum of money for the diamonds. I have not forgotten you."

He thanked her respectfully, and in a seemingly grateful way. He opened the door, and his master and mistress, the ladies Vallance, Annie, and the Abbé, who, by the

way, looked much scared with what had occurred, passed out.

After watching the whole party step into their chairs, I returned with an anxious mind to the room I had lately left. The door was partly open. On the ground, where the crushed earrings lay, knelt the figure of the man Stanford. In the palm of his hand was a fragment of the jewellery she had worn. This, wonderful to relate, he raised to his lips, and, with an air of passionate devotion, kissed it, after the manner holy men adored relics of their beloved saints. Astonished with this movement, I stepped forward with an exclamation of wonder, and asked him what on earth he was doing.

"Only picking up what her ladyship bid me, sir," he explained, confusedly, to my suspicious interrogation.

"You were kissing it, man," I said, irritably. "Why?"

"My mother's very poor, sir," answered the man, "and I am not rich. What my lady has made me a present of will relieve *her*, so I thank and bless her for it." And he raised the fragment of jewellery once more to his lips.

I mistrusted and suspected this person. I

did not believe a word of his tale, yet how refute it with no tangible proofs? As I looked straight into his face, with disbelief written in my eyes, he returned the glance, and smiled insolently.

"What do you mean by that?" said I, sternly. "Take heed lest you presume too much on your good fortune. That having saved your mistress's life —"

"By G—d! no man shall *presume* me with impunity," shouted he, clapping his hand to his side, as if a hanger usually hung there; and, finding nothing, became confused, and faltered out something unintelligible.

I placed my hand firmly on his shoulder, and said, calmly —

"Now tell me—who are you?"

"I am your very humble servant, sir, and my lord's first footman," said that individual, bowing low.

Completely disarmed by his humble and contrite demeanour, without another word I went in search of Valerian, with whom, as I have said before, I had an appointment.

* * * *

It was a wet, disagreeable night, when I turned into the street, and the rain came

pelting down as if it never intended to stop. The sky, black and threatening, looked as if the cheerful light of a morning sun would never again illumine and clear the gruesome denseness that overspread the heavens like a gigantic pall. Neither moon nor stars showed their kindly light. Everything was plunged in a pitchy darkness which partook much of a ghostly and funereal nature. Every now and then a link-boy, like a novel specimen of will-o'-the-wisp, danced his light before my eyes, and vanished directly afterwards, making the way darker than before.

Presently I emerged from the depressing obscurity, and turned with a feeling of thankfulness into a livelier and more frequented street. The curtains of some houses which I passed had not been drawn, and the cheerful lights within shed some of their rays into the street without. As I walked onwards, glancing every now and then into the rooms open for common observation, I saw children, merry and light-hearted, husbands and wives, happy in each other ; and I thought, with a heart-sickness, of that love and happiness which might have been *hers* !

Hers ! I was a fool to think of it ! I caught myself smiling bitterly for even venturing to dream of Almyra Marlande acting in the humble capacity of a good, cheerful wife who had no other thought than that of home ! In my heart of hearts, I believed she still loved my Lord of Alingdale ; and as I reached the door of Will's, I was wondering what kind of a ménage theirs would have been, supposing they had married, and how two such proud, unbending people would have gone through life together.

Further tranquil cogitation on the subject was rendered impossible by the simple fact of my coming in the midst of an extremely noisy assembly. I looked anxiously about at the faces which surrounded every table, and was disappointed in finding Valerian had not yet arrived. However, as it was a quarter of an hour before the time appointed, I retired into a corner of the room, and, taking a seat at one of the least-occupied tables, called for coffee. I had scarcely been five minutes in my place when another gentleman entered—a stoutish, jovial, rosy-cheeked veteran, who, with undisguised joy, I recognised as being none other

than Colonel Death. He no sooner beheld me than, swearing a mighty oath of delight, caught me by both hands, and, shaking them vehemently, declared he was d—d glad to see me. Although my pleasure at seeing him was not smaller than his, I contented myself by returning the Herculean shake, and *looking* the rest.

“And what good wind blows you here, Hal?” he asked, when we had shaken each other’s hands till they positively ached with pain.

I explained as briefly as I could, also telling him that I had come there by appointment to meet an old college friend.

“Alingdale’s coming home in a couple of months,” he said, in answer to my inquiry whether he had heard any news from that nobleman.

“Does he know—?” I began.

He guessed the rest, and nodded, blowing a great volume of smoke slowly into the air, and watching it gravely till it had melted.

“I wrote to him about it,” he observed, with a sigh, “and the next letter I received from him (in answer to the one in which I told him about Mistress Allie’s marriage) he didn’t

seem to be cut up in the least. I thought he'd be mad. He wasn't though, for he actually treated the whole business in his own devil-may-care fashion, and wrote so funnily, that I roared over the letter. After all, perhaps his love for Miss Allie was only a whim that lasted—like—like his whims usually do," he explained, drawing another whiff from his pipe, and watching the smoke dissolve as if he were moralising to himself.

During the interval of silence that followed the Colonel's speech, in momentary abstraction I glanced at the opposite table, and there remarked someone looking very curiously at me.

CHAPTER XXII.

OUR eyes met, and then I felt convinced at having, at some remote period, seen and spoken with the man before. He was of middle age, very dark, and in no ways ill-looking. On the contrary; but for some ignoble slyness of manner and face, he would have been handsome, despite the moustache that embellished his upper lip being dyed to correspond to the blackness of his wig. He was fashionably though not foppishly attired in dark maroon velvet, laced with silver, and the only jewellery he wore was one great ruby brooch at his neck.

Forgetting that rule, which even children are expected to remember, namely, that of ‘staring rudely,’ I looked and looked, ransacking my memory meanwhile for the place and

time, where and when, I could have first seen the face opposite me. On one point I was convinced, I had not spoken to him lately—it must have been long ago, ere I went to college, yet not at Steyneville—where could it have been? His handsome, sinister eyes especially haunted me. I could have chastised myself with forgetting, when suddenly, like a flash of lightning that blasts all that is in its way, a fearful thought struck me, and I whispered a name to the veteran beside me, that forced him to look in amazement at me and gasp —

“ Where ?”

Quietly as I could I drew his attention to the stranger, who now feigned to be absorbed in contemplating the clearness of his wine by holding it to the light.

“ By gad, it’s him ; all right ! It’s de la Motte, as I live ! Know his cut anywhere,” he exclaimed.

The honest Colonel knew nothing of the spy’s treacherous conduct to my dear lady, but as instinctively as an open heart’s generous nature shrinks from a close mean one, had never liked or trusted him. The Colonel used to say he could read “ *his*

men," and that the "French chap" was never numbered among the favoured few, but I have my doubts on that score. I am afraid that the soldier had a hearty British dislike and contempt for the "finnicking foreigners," as he called them. And that he never wished, or would care to if he could, understand their [*adjective*] heathenish lingo.

I rose. Heaven only knows what wild, disordered fancies flitted through my brain ; but first among them and foremost, was the figure of my dead mistress, whose death I felt sure had been accelerated by him. I rose with a purpose, bad, and revengeful, if you will, but still a purpose.

"What's the matter ?" exclaimed the Colonel, laying a heavy hand on my shoulder. " You don't intend to speak to *him*, do you ?"

" Why not ?" I articulated ; " he has done *me* no harm."

" O ! he's your friend, Hal, that's different. But, 'pon my honour, I gave you credit for having better taste," said the other. " Go, since you will, but don't bring him this way, that's all ! I'll have nothing to do with him."

I went to where the ex-spy sat. Four gentlemen intent on cards at the same table, simultaneously looked up, and down again, on my appearance.

"I know you," I whispered sternly.

"The devil you do?" he said, with an amused smile, "And who am I, pray?"

"A renegade—a traitor—one who is not fit to cross swords with an honest man!"

"Indeed! I thought I recognised in you one who would be delighted to do so," he cried, mockingly. "So you are Harold Steyneville (you see I do not forget old friends). How tall thou art grown! and how like—sapristi—yes, how very like—someone else."

"Say on. Try my patience to the utmost. I will save you the trouble of unsheathing your sword by proclaiming you in your true light to the whole room."

"Yes, that's very bravely and cleverly said! But how about proofs. Defamation of character, my rash young friend, is liable to imprisonment, pillory, and such like. How would that proud head bear itself after the body had received a whipping—a sound whipping and a public one—he? I do not

threaten, I only expostulate. Be warned in time, and leave me."

"I must ask you to give me satisfaction. You know for what," said I, as calmly as I could.

"Give—you—satisfaction?" he repeated, smilingly.

"Yes."

"No!" he returned, coolly and deliberately, "I will not."

"You must."

"Ha! ha! Must! And who shall make me? Nom de Dieu."

"I."

"You! Splendid! But how, pray?"

"I shall show you."

"It would be eminently amusing. I entreat you to do so without delay."

The renegade's face being close to my hand, without delay I gave him a sounding box on the ear. In a minute the whole place was in an uproar. Cards were flung to the ground, tables overturned, glasses broken, wine spilled, and de la Motte was seized and held back by the gentleman who had been playing at the same table, and I found myself in the grasp of the Colonel and Valerian,

who, by-the-bye, had just arrived in time to see the blow.

“Who began it?” cried out half-a-dozen voices at once.

De la Motte, trembling with rage, and violently endeavouring to extricate himself from those who held him back, hissed through his clenched teeth —

“He did. S-a-c-r-r-r-é.”

“Shame! shame!” said a spruce gentleman, stepping forward. “What was the cause?”

“Ay, damme, what’s the row about?” cried another gentleman, much younger, more excited, and more *drunk* than the other.

“Arrah,” shouted an Irish military gentleman, ferociously, “is this the beheevior of men—of gintlemen?”

“There! There! Be quiet a moment, Patrick,” interposed the first speaker. “I saw the whole affair. That gentleman,” pointing to me, “without provocation, boxed this one’s ears!”

“Allow me to say something on the matter, too,” observed another gentleman, considerably older than either of the others who had interfered. “I have no doubt that that

gentleman," pointing to me, "had his good reasons for so doing."

"Then let him explain 'em, that's all," interrupted another.

"Ay, ay, quite right; let him explain."

Here I was in a most unenviable position. Indeed, matters would have gone very hard against me but for Valerian, for I was resolved on maintaining a stern silence as to the true cause of the quarrel. The history of my benefactress's unfortunate love affair I was determined should not become the talk and scandal of a set of unprincipled men. Besides, among the whole crowd there was not one single suspect—all were loyal, staunch partisans of the Protestant cause. Had they known that the spy had acted in that cause against Papistry and the Pretender, who knows but that their blind fanatical love for the reigning queen, triumphing over all feelings of honour and manliness, might have led them to praise, not blame, the rascal for his pseudo-loyalty.

Whilst I was meditating for an appropriate answer to the natural demand for an explanation, Valerian, who had hitherto remained a silent spectator in the background,

with a movement of astonishment, stepped forward to my side and confronted the spy. Universal silence reigned. Whether the men wondered to see the extraordinary likeness between us, or whether they were struck by the unmoved dignity of manner in one so young, I could not decide ; most likely it was the latter which had such an effect. Who amongst us cannot recollect having once heard, read of, or seen such master-spirits who, unproclaimed, come forward in the hour of need, and, by a gesture, curb or swell a rebellion !

“This man,” said Valerian, simply pointing to de la Motte, “I know to be a villain, a renegade, a moral assassin, gentlemen ! *Desangiers* ! deny the accusations, and look me in the face while you do so ! ”

“It’s a plot, a plot ! Do, don’t believe him,” gasped the wretch, confusedly, as the noble figure of him he had so wronged towered with indignant justice before him.

“A plot ! ” exclaimed Valerian, bitterly. “Devil ! Do you speak of plots to me ? Do you remember this letter” (drawing one forth), “one of the many you wrote to that pure angel, whose mind you poisoned, without

pity, without remorse? O, a fiend might have shown mercy to such innocence and youth! But I have at last hunted you down, and I thank God for it."

He spoke so earnestly and fervently that all to a man were ready to swear to the spy's guilt. Such was the effect of the young man's passionate sorrow and sincerity that every man amongst them was ready to see him satisfied."

"She died," he cried, in a cold, strained voice, "believing me to be the guilty wretch you wrote her I was. She, assisted by your cursed machinations, had gathered sufficient proofs of my supposed treachery. Treachery! I that would have thankfully died to save her pain. She died by her own hand; the little hand that had written forgiveness but a short while before. The hand that had once rested so confiding and trustingly in mine. I loved her so," he said, with hoarse energy, "that in a mad regret at her death I would have done away with my own worthless life but for—*you*." And he sprung forward and laid an iron grip on the shrinking man's shoulder.

De la Motte, rascal as he was, was no

coward. The grasp of the young fellow's hand put new life into his body. Like a wolf at bay with the hounds' teeth in his flanks, he drew himself up, and with a look of malignant hatred tried to shake him off.

"So you want satisfaction too, I suppose," he sneered, scowling darkly. "One at the time, please, messieurs ; decide between yourselves who first shall bid adieu to the pleasures of this world to greet the uncertainties of the next."

I here interposed, with as much distinctness as I could, that I had, as the elder, the right of meeting him first.

De la Motte, or Desangiers, with the burning marks of my fingers still on his face, and with a long r'd sacré, said he thought so too, with an unmistakable emphasis, meaning to assure me that it would fare badly with me.

"Harold," said Valerian, imploringly, running to me and throwing his arm about my neck, "you don't mean that, surely?"

"My dear fellow," I responded, earnestly, "I mean it. And what is more, nothing on earth will induce me to alter my resolution.

I have owed the debt long enough ; it is time I should discharge it."

Deaf to his entreaties that he should be the first to meet De la Motte, it was arranged that on the following morning, at six o'clock we should be behind Montague House. The weapons were pistols, and my second was Death. Valerian, on my refusal to grant him his request, had turned moodily away, and did not even offer to accompany me to the appointed spot on the following morning.

As he, the Colonel, and I left Will's and walked down the Strand arm-in-arm, somewhat excited with the night's adventure, Valerian turned rather suddenly upon me with the question if it would not be better for me to spend the rest of the night at his lodgings, as it wanted but a very few hours to the dawn, and that I might oversleep myself and be too late on the ground.

"Just the very thing," exclaimed the Colonel, "for you know, Hal, my son, that it will be no light matter for you to slip out unobserved to-morrow morning. Besides, affairs like these get wind before you know where you are, and bless your soul,

if Annie hears of it she'll go stark staring mad and prevent you. You can tell her of the business afterwards."

" You seem convinced that I shall be the victor," I said, with a shrug.

" Why won't you ? " ejaculated he, blankly. " Thought you were a good shot ? "

" Yes ; but that does not prevent him from being a better one, does it ? "

We walked on for some time without speaking.

Presently Valerian again broke silence by saying, with a strange eagerness —

" Ay ; but you will accept my invitation, Hal, to stay the night with me ? Who knows but that it may not be the last ? "

" That college chum of yours seems a lively customer," whispered the Colonel, ironically, who was at the opposite side to me, in my ear. " But accept his proposal all the same ; more good can come of it than bad. Judging by his manner towards you, he seems to have your welfare at heart."

To the end of my days I shall never cease to blame myself for having taken his advice. I thanked him for the offer, and said I would gladly avail myself of it.

Having at length reached his door, Colonel Death, with many expressions of hope and encouragement (none, happily, of which I was in need, though the kind gentleman's words were in every respect like himself, honest, brave, and simple), left us, saying he would be at the appointed spot punctually.

There was a cheerful light in Valerian's apartments, and I in no ways regretted in having come. The rooms were luxurious enough, and bore the impress of the owner's good taste. I could not help telling him as much as I glanced round at the shining mirrors, beautiful pictures, costly books, and inlaid cabinets with which it was decorated.

"Good taste!" echoed Valerian, depreciatingly. "Good money, you mean. I told the upholsterer to furnish my room, and to spare neither pains nor pelf. He has done so. What you see about you is his work, not mine. Never," said he, laughingly, "praise a rich man for his taste; otherwise you will be taken either for a sycophant or an inveterate cynic."

At that juncture Weiss, his German valet, entered bearing a tray with two cups of hot coffee, a cold chicken, salad, bread, and a

decanter of cognac. This he spread on the table and waited for further orders.

“Are my pistols in good order?” asked Valerian.

To this the man, with ill-concealed surprise at so unusual a question from his master, who was no modern bragadoccio duellist, answered —

“Nein, mein Herr; they can soon be got ready though.”

“Then clean and prepare them for immediate use,” said Valerian.

“For immediate use!” repeated the man, hesitatingly, looking anxiously from one to the other.

“Yes.”

“O, Herr! is it, can it be,” he said, brokenly, “that you are—or have found—that *man*, and are going to meet *him*? Pardon me, a humble servant, for daring to ask you, but—but—indeed I meant no harm. I only thought —”

It brought tears to my eyes to see the affectionate solicitude for his master’s welfare; and I was glad that this dear friend and kinsman of mine had a servant about him who was in every respect so well worthy of his

master's trust and confidence. Having taken a load off the fellow's mind by informing him that *I*, and not the Herr, was going to make use of the pistols, with ill-disguised satisfaction he left us to perform his commission.

"Weiss, as I told you, was with me *then*," explained Valerian, stifling a sigh, "and somehow or other has become attached to me."

"Somehow or other!" He must have been less than a man who could have understood so much nobility and unaffected goodness.

"By-the-bye," he observed, "we neither of us will go to bed, as it is not worth while. But it is better to take a rest, so you lay down on that couch and I'll sleep awhile here," pointing to an arm-chair.

Having written two letters, one to my cousin and another to my lord, in case the worst came to the worst, though I did not fear much on that score, obedient to his will I laid down; but finding I could not sleep, rose and paced the room, filled with vague apprehensions of I know not what.

"Come, come, this will never do," cried Valerian, emphatically. "Just drink this glass

of cognac ; it will send you to sleep for a couple of hours at least."

I did not see him pour the liquor into the glass, but drank what he extended to me in a kind of feverish haste.

Never did brandy have such a strange influence over me. I struggled against a fearful feeling of overpowering weakness and sleep, ultimately sinking down on the couch in a state of semi-stupefaction.

"For God's sake tell me," I gasped, a thought striking me into sudden vivacity, "was that only brandy you gave me, or—
or —"

My senses were rapidly deserting me, the room swam round and round, and I caught hold of the couch to save myself from falling.

It might have been a mad fancy, but I thought I saw Valerian kneeling by my side, and, with a strange, strange smile on his lips, unbutton my coat. It might have been the fantastic thought of delirium, but I thought he looked at me and kissed me on my unworthy hand and brow with ineffable tenderness. Was it a dream or did I really cry heavily—

“ What have you done ? O, what have you done ? Can I meet that man to-morrow like this—like this— ? ” and I continued to murmur, “ What have you done ? O, what have you done ? ” insanely and stupidly, clenching my hands feebly together, vainly endeavouring to make a tight fist.

Was it a dream or was it reality ? Did Valerian bend over me and whisper to my ear sadly, “ It is for the best ; O, try and think, dear brother, that it is for the best.” Did I really attempt to rise and look sternly at him with a word of reproach on my lips, and weakly sink back again, my eyes and lips refusing to do their office ? Did I really shrink from his embrace and endeavour to echo in scorn his “ I did it for the best.” I cannot tell even now whether all this was imaginary or descriptive of objects and occurrences actually existing and passing at the time, but on one point I am positively certain, viz., that I fell into a dreamless slumber, which perhaps may be more correctly described as unconsciousness.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"DEAD ! dead !" somebody groaned. " Dead ! dead ! and his dear friend sleeping heavily, as if nothing had occurred, on his couch."

I started up ; the sun was shining with mid-day splendour into the room. A man was pacing up and down the room with a heavy martial tread. He had his face buried in his hands, and was seemingly giving way to a fit of uncontrollable sorrow. I rubbed my eyes and looked about me. The events of the preceding night came back in vivid colours to me. I should have met de la Motte at six o'clock. I rose and ran to the clock. Too late, too late ! It had struck twelve, and I was a dishonoured, wretched man. Where was Valerian ? My knees trembled feebly beneath me, and I had scarcely tottered towards the

door and laid my hand on it when I sunk, a pitiable object, to the floor. Colonel Death, for he it was, assisted me to rise, with eyes full of tears, and led me to the couch I had left scarcely two minutes before somewhat roughly.

“Ah, sir, is it thus a man should behave towards—Never mind,” he said, with a gulp, “suppose you drunk your wits away while—O, the villain! Oh, poor poor”—He stopped with a hoarse sob, and turned his head aside.

I deserved his censure, and my heart echoed within me, “Is it thus a man should behave?” I felt so abased, degraded and weak that I would have gladly died. I had made my kind friend shed tears for my supposed cowardice. I would try and explain matters to him. I said, falteringly, that it might not be so bad after all, that—

“Not so bad after all!” he said bitterly. “Not so bad! I tell you he is stone dead—killed by that cursed villain, who, thank God, has a wound that he cannot recover from.”

“He’s dead you say!” I cried fearfully, seizing hold of his arm with a strength that a horrible thought alone inspired. “Who’s dead? Tell me who is it that’s dead?”

Struck by my earnestness he recoiled, and through his blinding tears looked strangely at me.

"Man, are you mad?" he shouted at last, fiercely and despairingly, "or don't you really know?" wrenching his wrist from my clasp, as if in bitterness of contempt.

"As Heaven is above us I swear I do not," I said, solemnly.

"Then," he whispered hoarsely, "if you ever had a friend, Harold Steyneville, whom you used to call Saint, and whom I believe now is truly one in heaven, weep for the loss of one of the truest men or earth."

"Why?"

"He is dead! Whilst you were sleeping there, Hal—dear, dear old Hal—received a bullet through the heart, and I saw him die without a groan, without a single tear, but with a smile and blessing on his lips," said the old veteran, tremulously, "like a child before it goes to its bed."

"Are you shedding tears for him? Then do so no more. He who died this morning," I said, calmly, with an icy coldness at my heart, "was his friend. I am Harold Steyneville. I am his unworthy comrade."

It was too true. Valerian de Crespigny had drugged me to take my place in the duel.

* * * * *

The Colonel gave me the following details of the encounter.

It was a beautiful fresh morning, and the grass, trees, and flowers were yet glistening with crystal dew. Few people were astir, and those few who were evinced little or no curiosity at seeing gentlemen of such good fashion abroad so early betimes. There was no waiting. They arrived, curiously enough, all together at one time, and preliminaries being arranged, the antagonists were placed fifteen paces apart, and at the given signal fired. Both fell, Valerian expiring immediately, and the renegade receiving a bad wound in the shoulder, which rendered him senseless.

I asked, as well as I could, if he had sent any message?

“ Yes, yes,” recollect ed the Colonel, “ I was just about to drop the handkerchief when he called out to me that he had something to say. ‘ Tell my friend, my dear, dear friend,’ he said, ‘ should I fall by that man’s hand, that I cannot give him a better proof of my

unalterable love than this' (I could not understand it at the time, thinking it was you), 'that it happens for the best; and that if I die I die content and happy in his affection, and in the lost one of my dead Lorenza.' I think that was the name he said," observed the Colonel, gravely, holding my hand in his. "The strangest thing of all, perhaps," he continued, "was this. I noticed he wore a severe and stern expression before—before—the affair, but afterwards smiled as if— Good God ! how pale you are, and trembling, too, as if with ague."

"Where is he ?" I asked, trying to speak calmly.

"They are going to bring the body here ; I told them to. Come away with me ; you must not see it."

I do not recollect what I said to overthrow the Colonel's opposition to my seeing my half-brother's dear face again, but whatever I did say had the desired effect. Whether it was my earnestness or the heartsick anguish of my tones, I cannot tell, but ultimately the Colonel yielded to my entreaties, and I sat down, with a strange, indescribable feeling of being anybody and

anything but myself. I sat down, I say, without a sigh or a tear, in patient expectation to wait *its coming*.

* * * * *

They laid all that remained of that noble, ill-fated spirit reverently on his bed. The story, that of the morning, was already the theme for wondering and whispered conversation. They that had brought him back, they that had, though only rough labouring men, taken him up tenderly from the spot on which he had fallen, kept aloof, gazing with awe-struck eyes on the prostrate figure. I alone approached him. I think I heard someone whisper, “Hold him back,” but I looked sternly at the speaker, or tried to do so, and no one so much as touched me.

I crept close to him and knelt down by the bedside. O, how soon our positions were changed! Only last night he was the humble pleader—I the stern accuser. Now I was the supplicating, and he the accusing; but only in thought—only in thought—for his lips were parted in a smile of content that they had never worn in life-time. His beautiful tangled hair had been brushed off his forehead, still damp and

scarcely cold, and hung in a matted, curling mass over both shoulders. I caught his dear hand in mine, never so dear but when I knew I had lost its kindly clasp for ever ; but it was cold ; senselessly and vainly I attempted to warm it with my own trembling fingers ! His colour was not ashen, but pale, as it had always been in lifetime. Even his lips had scarcely lost their healthy colour. He could not be dead, I thought within myself, and buoyed up by this mad hope, a sudden revulsion of feeling took place. Did death look so beautiful, so natural ? Impossible ! “ He is asleep,” I said, whisperingly, to those about me. “ Hush ! do not speak ; do not either of you wake him. I alone will.” Forgetting the fearful morning’s work, I leant over him breathlessly—O, God, what to see ? That fearful bloodless thrust; and, what I had not remarked before, his wide open eyes—open and staring, lightless and without reason, staring into the space beyond ; those wonderful eyes which had thrilled me so on our first meeting—those miracles that showed the truth, honour, and nobility which dwelt in the young mind—were quenched for ever and their light extinguished. I started

back, and cried in a fearful, tearless voice why they had not closed them, if they left them open on purpose to look reproachfully at the unhappy instrument that caused their fire to burn no more !

No one answered. A man, whom I afterwards learned to be a doctor, stepped forward from the group, and said —

“ If you can shed tears, sir — ”

“ Shed tears ! ” I exclaimed. “ Look at him. Does he not look happier than he ever did in life ? Why should I cry like a puling child, then ? Man ! man ! ” I cried, shaking him furiously, “ you are a fool ! I tell you tears would not avail here. If sorrow should be demonstrated at his happy release, let all that knew him, let all on whom his sainted eyes ever rested, kill themselves. Death is not too much. I tell you I will follow him—I— ”

They held me back, about five of them, the Colonel amongst the number, and took my sword from me. Somebody covered the dead man’s face tenderly with a cloth.

I never saw it again. With a mad laugh I fell heavily back amongst them, and for the second time in my life lost all consciousness.

CHAPTER XXIV.

FOR about two months subsequent to Valerian's death my life was a blank. I have a vague recollection of lying in bed surrounded by a hundred forms that my fevered brain conjured up, and being tormented by demons. The figures about my bedside had all glassy, sightless eyes, and seemed to wish to stare me out of reason. I cried for help, and it appeared two arms wound themselves about my neck in answer to my call, and that a voice that once was familiar to me spent itself in useless entreaties for me to be calm. I would have given worlds to obey, but just as I was about to sink back overpowered on the pillows again the glassy, sightless eyes of the

hundred forms looked reproachfully at me, a thousand demons in the air began to chant in a monotonous voice —

Best as it is ! best as it is ! best as it is !

beginning very softly, and ending very loudly, driving me mad with the continual refrain. At one time I thought myself suspended half way over a frightfully black abyss. Clutching at my feet were the hands of the hated renegade, who was the cause of all my sorrow ; above, holding my hands tightly clasped in his, was the radiant form of Valerian. I was on a rack ; one pulled one way—the other, the other. The pains I endured were excruciating. O, would nothing come to save me, I groaned. Presently de la Motte, loosening his hold, fell down the abyss, from whose bottom I could still see the malicious eyes twinkling at me. As I was about to rise with my brother I noticed a woman kneeling at the brink of the abyss, and holding out her arms in an attitude of prayer. “ Let me go,” she moaned. “ What am I without thee ? O, thou my more than father ! ”

It was Annie. “ Nay,” cried Valerian, “ only one, or neither, may come.”

Then I pointed to her who knelt, and said —

“Take her, then, to your land of everlasting bliss! I am a man, and can wait till my time comes.”

“I cannot go without thee,” she said, humbly and submissively; “where thou goest I must go, if thou stayest I will stay.”

“Dost hear?” asked the radiant figure, with a pitying smile.

I heard and was about to answer, when a contemptuous laugh broke upon my ear. Dressed in gay colours, herself bright and beautiful, with one foot as if to step into the abyss, stood Almyra, gazing with scornful eyes on the whole scene. Instantly Annie and Valerian were as nothing. I hastened to her side—the one whom as a little child I had loved—and besought her on my knees not to step farther. What did she do? Pointing with a low, mocking laugh at the shadowy, prostrate figure of her husband, she wilfully, despite my entreaties and warnings, stepped into the black abyss and was lost to sight for ever. With a hollow groan I sprang forward myself and would have fallen too; but —

“Harold! Harold! the danger is over, the climax is reached, and you are getting better.”

I opened my eyes and stared hardly about me. I was at the bottom of no pit; on the contrary, I lay on a white bed, possibly my own, and felt very weak and stupid. Whose cold hand did I clutch so fervently within my own parched ones? Whose were the eyes that met mine so affectionately and kindly? Whose were the tears that fell so fast in thankfulness down cheeks pale with nights of watching with unwearied patience at my bedside? Ah! to whom should that hand, those eyes and tears belong but to my kinswoman, Annie!

I was so very feeble, weak, and wretched as thoughts of the past came crowding to my mind that my trembling lips could scarcely form words with which I could testify my gratitude for her goodness. But somehow I gave her to understand that I should never repay her for all her goodness, and that I blessed her, and, like a spiritless, feeble creature that I was, burst into tears. This did me much good. Could I have shed

them *then*, in all probability I would have escaped a severe illness.

When I was well again I learned from Batty with what noble forgetfulness of self my dear cousin had tended me during my long malady. How, when I was first taken ill, she took upon her own tender conscience all risks, and had me conveyed home—despite the entreaties of Almyra and her husband to stay—so she might nurse me herself. “I was jealous,” she said, laughingly. “I didn’t want anyone to nurse you but my own greedy self—to give you your doses of physic, sir. I derived a certain malicious pleasure in forcing you to take the nasty stuff.”

Her kinsman, for answer, reverently took her hand and raised it to his lips tenderly. Had he not been less of a blind fool, very likely he would have set the crimson blush down to its true cause; as it was he only took her hand, and she blushed—and for the present that was the end of the matter.

“By-the-bye,” I asked one day, “has anyone called during my illness?”

Only my lawyer, and he was expected to call that day again. Annie had written

acquainting him of my recovery, as he said he wished to speak to me on very urgent business when he called during my illness.

Mr. Feegrat made his appearance whilst we were seated at our modest meal, consisting of a roast leg of mutton, potatoes, and greens. The only thing of worth that graced our humble board was a bottle of good claret, a glass of which I had no difficulty in forcing the lawyer to drink. He was a hard-visaged, shrewd little man, as most men of his profession are, and thoroughly averse to anything like loss or waste of time. Having this in mind, and tossing off his claret to the health of Annie with the air of a man who is doing his duty, we went into my study together, for he assured me his communications were of a strictly private nature.

"Now don't be alarmed, Mr. Steyneville," he began smoothly, closing the door firmly behind him, "although the news I have to tell you is far from pleasant."

I was beginning to be so accustomed to sorrow that I found myself vaguely wondering what this new trouble could be—no, dreading and fearing to hear it.

He looked at me attentively.

" You are a young man, and the world is before you — ”

" Yes, yes," I remarked somewhat impatiently, " I know that. But pray let us come to business at once, without delay. What is it you have to tell me ? "

" Of course," he said, approvingly, " as a lawyer I should not hesitate; as a friend, I must. To begin with, you have but lately recovered from a severe illness. Are you well enough to hear — "

" Anything, I assure you, my dear sir," I returned.

Again I caught myself wondering what on earth more I had to lose. My hopes and love were both gone—what else remained? Suddenly I recollect ed with a sort of bitter satisfaction that a small annuity and a roof were mine. Perhaps *they* were about to go from me, too; and I remembered, with a heart-ache for my poor Annie, that I had dabbled in a speculation.

Yes, the truth must come out sooner or later, and he told me in a few words that I was ruined. The undertaking in which I had launched may all was worthless, and my money lost.



"A strange gentleman to see you, Master Harold," said Batty, popping her head into the library, two hours after the lawyer had left. I was meditating on the next course of action best to be pursued, and had arrived at no fixed conclusion.

"Show him in," I answered wearily.

I had scarcely said the words, when the door opened wider and the gentleman entered.

The light of the setting sun was full upon his face, which was distended by a courteous smile, showing a set of glittering white teeth. He was dressed quietly, but in good taste, and bore in his hand, half obscured by costly ruffles, a valuable clouded cane. As Batty, after a look of undisguised wonder, left the room, he handed me his pasteboard, on which was inscribed —

"JOHN MARLANDE."

John Marlande! I fell back a step, and regarded the stranger intently. Now I recollect where I had last seen him. It was at Stapleton's ball, when I was masqued in Sydney's stead. Now the strange interest he had manifested for my two kinswomen, or at least one of them, appeared in a clear

light to me. Who would have asked so eagerly after a favourite child save a father?

But I bore in mind, at the same time, that he had not acted justly either towards them or their mother; that he had treated his wife and eldest child almost cruelly, and that the former had at length succumbed, being of a gentle, trusting nature, owing to his heartless treatment of her. The remains of a handsome, selfish man were there; and I recognised in him, remembering my dear father's description of his brother-in-law, the father of Almyra and Annie.

The meeting between the uncle and nephew, as may be readily supposed, was neither of a warm nor demonstrative nature. The father of the two girls was jealous of his nephew's possessing a great share of their affection and esteem; and the nephew, on the other side, was heartily disgusted with their parent's hitherto unfatherly conduct.

He was opulent now, he said, having worked hard for his riches in far-off lands. He had undergone many hardships, had endured numberless privations, had suffered long, only at last to be enabled to give a

home to his daughters. He knew only one remained. That one he was contented to take to his heart and house. On that one should his wealth of love and pocket be spent; she should want for nothing that money could buy or affection give, etc., etc.

I listened to him as if in a dream. The events of the past few months came crowding thick upon me; why had I not been allowed to die? Why had I escaped death to lead on a miserable, hopeless, wretched, workless, loveless life? What was I in the universe? A useless speck of dust, blown hither and thither by all the cold, cruel winds; a poor, pitiable creature mocked and gibed at by Fortune, driven and oppressed by a tyrannical Fate, whose iron hands seemed to derive pleasure in torturing me.

Awakening from a reverie, I rose and rang the bell.

Birch answered.

“ Ask Miss Annie to come here,”

Birch disappeared, and immediately afterwards a light footstep was heard, the handle turned, and my cousin, wondering at my protracted absence, entered.

Without casting a glance on either side,

for the crusty Birch had not told her of a visitor, she walked straight up to me, and asked me gently what I wished of her.

"See here, cousin," I said, "we have a visitor"—she turned, started, and dropped a curtsey—"who claims to be your kinsman."

"My kinsman!" she cried, quickly, turning pale. "O, you are joking, Harold, for I know all our kin are dead but you."

"Not all," observed my newly-found uncle, coming forward, "for *one* lives. One lives still, young lady."

"Lives still!" repeated Annie, turning pale and shrinking from the other's smile. "Who can it be? Harold, you never told me."

"My dear, I never knew it till this moment myself."

She shrunk still more from Mr. Marlande's smile, and coming close to me she put her hands on my shoulder, and looked with a frightened expression into my face.

"Who is it?" she gasped. "I am afraid to think; let me whisper. Look, Harold, look!" sinking on her knees. "It is—cannot you see the likeness, or is it my fancy? —it is Almyra's father and mine!"

A strange meeting, truly, between father and daughter.

"Hush! hush!" I whispered, at once alarmed and pained, "dear girl, is it thus you welcome him! Think—think how he has worked and prayed to see you."

"Me—me!" she sobbed. "He never even kissed me. O, I remember when I was a little child, to have been only—only an eyesore to him!"

I entreated her to listen to me, and assured her that her father loved her, and would be kind and affectionate to his only daughter. That he wished to secure her happiness—his only aim in life now; that he had had time to change—

"Nay, nay, Harold," she said, trembling on the arm that supported her, "never believe that. But—must I go to him?" she whispered, terrified, as I led her gently to his side.

"Humph," quoth Mr. Marlande, "has your cousin, among other things, daughter, taught you the duty of a child towards its parent, eh?"

"Sir, sir," stammered the poor girl, "if I am awkward—"

"You are confoundedly so," assented the kind parent, emphatically. "Almyra would not behave thus, I warrant."

She looked beseechingly into his hard face. Not one muscle relaxed or softened, but if possible it gazed at the drooping head with a kind of diabolical, malicious, pleasure.

"Come, come," he said, at last, "this picture is all very well for a *tableaux vivant*, but I have no more time to waste. Daughter, get your hat and cloak, bid your adieux, and come with me! I will arrange pecuniary matters with my nephew there. You will tell me your charges for boarding, dressing, and educating my daughters, sir, for so many years. I do not wish to continue your debtor."

A few months before I would, boiling with indignation, doubtless have clapped my hand to my sword and demanded what on earth he meant by the insult. But I had grown cooler now, perhaps the apothecary had let flow, besides a great quantity of blood from my body, no mean quantity of impetuosity.

As Annie left the room, very pale, but quite calm, Mr. Marlande drew forth a book full of notes and paper.

“Here, sir, this will amply repay you,” he said.

“You will do me a favour by replacing it in your pocket,” I returned. “I could not think of accepting a farthing of your money.”

“I tell you sir, I do not require a present from *you*.”

“Very probable. Nor do I wish one from *you*.”

“’Tis a debt, not a present.”

“Pardon me, ’tis a present, not a debt. Either way, I cannot accept the money.”

“I shall leave it on the table. I do not wish to be indebted to you, I say again; for when my daughter has once left your roof I wish all communications between you both to cease.”

“As you please, sir. Still, I cannot accept your money.”

“I will leave it on the table; once alone with it,” he cried, mockingly, “your fine chivalric notions will change, I have no doubt,” and he flung the note-book on the table.

Turning a deaf ear to my remonstrances, and sneering openly at what he considered hypocrisy on my part, I hastily struck a

light, and taking one of the notes held it in the flame till nothing remained of it but a black ash.

“ Bah, nephew ! ” he cried, tauntingly, showing his white teeth like a wolf preparing to bite, “ I have been a young man myself. I know these tricks too well to be frightened by them. You are not rich, I know. Keep the rest. It — ”

“ Will you take the notes back ? ”

“ No.”

Another flame—another note reduced to ash.

“ Now ? ”

“ D—n you, no ! ”

Another flame—two more ashes.

“ What say you now, sir ? You see I am in earnest. Will you take it back, once for all ? ”

“ Burn the whole, and yourself too, jackanapes. Again I say, no, no, no ! ”

In this respect uncle and nephew were alike. Neither giving in, the whole bookful of notes was burned. The last flame had just flickered out when Annie returned, composed and dressed for walking.

“ So you are ready, girl ? ” observed her father, harshly.

“Yes, sir.”

“Then come. Don’t take anything with—that he has bought for you.”

“Sir!” cried the young lady, who could not take up cudgels in her own defence, flushing crimson, “these are but poor thanks for years of devotion and self-sacrificing goodness.”

“Ha! madam, so you are saucy, are you? You have been in a good school, I see. That is well. I have worked through long years, toiling like a slave for my daughters, to receive such a welcome! But I deserve it, doting fool that I am!”

He put on such a look of anguish that had I trusted my kinsman more, I would have pitied him from my heart.

Annie already reproached herself for behaving *à la* Goneril and Regan to a Lear of a father. She approached him timidly, and, laying her hand on his arm, said—

“Indeed, father, if I spoke cruelly just now, I am very sorry for it. But did you only know how good our kinsman has been to us in your—your absence you would pardon me for my momentary severity, and even excuse my forgetfulness, which I deeply

regret. During all the years you were away he loved us, and attended to our wants and education like you yourself, sir, would have done. Always noble and self-forgetting, making Allie's happiness and mine his chief object in life. Ah ! I ask you, as my father, how could I help taking his part knowing what I do ? But you did not know, else you would not have spoken so severely. But for us he might have been a great man now, for he has all the talents ; he gave up his dreams of fortune and fame to settle here, without complaining, to be the guardian of two young motherless and, as we thought, fatherless, girls. O, sir," said the dear girl, clasping her hands, " tell me, your daughter, for all these years of self-denial, devotion, and love does he not deserve your thanks and our most affectionate esteem and love ? "

" Enough, daughter," said my uncle, stiffly. " I thank him, and have offered him considerable wealth for his care of you both. This he has refused. I cannot help it."

" He refused ! " she repeated, a joyful blush suffusing her pale cheeks. " Yes, that is my kinsman. I knew he would."

" You knew he would, hey ? " observed Mr. Marlande, ironically. " And that is ' my kinsman.' Do you know that when you have once left this roof you are henceforth to be as strangers, and see each other no more with my consent ? "

" No more ! No more with your consent ! O, father ! " cried the young lady, beseechingingly, " you cannot mean it ! It is not possible ! "

He shrugged his shoulders, and said contemptuously that he *did* mean, and that it *was* possible ; and, further, he wished her to make the scene as short as possible. With this remark, he drummed the ferrule of his cane softly on the ground, and hummed a tune very unconcernedly.

" Harold ! Harold ! " said my cousin, putting her arms about my neck, with a sob, " I have always loved you, dear, like a —like a brother. And now the thought to be parted from you for ever, never to see your face again, is too cruel. What have you done to make him so incensed against you ? Perhaps, when his anger is cooled, he will regret his hastiness and love you."

" Perhaps, my dear," I said, to soothe her.

“Perhaps he will—who knows? and we may yet all be happy together.”

Heaven forgive me for holding out that false hope. I never believed it myself, glancing at his pitiless countenance and unconcerned manner.

“O! do you really think so, Harold? If you did not, if I really thought that after this I am never to see your face again, I could not leave you now. How can I love him? Are not all my childish recollections of him full of his unkindness and austerity—not only to myself, but to my poor mother? You say he has changed. O, cousin, I tell you no, no, no, no! And if I leave you I go to certain misery again,” she cried, whisperingly.

“Daughter,” cried her father, “if the vapors have left thee, I fain would start. Art thou ready? Or wilt thou weep a few more tears over thy handsome kinsman’s head? I can well understand thee. Thine is the choice of all women: a handsome gallant instead of an old ugly father.”

She started as if stung.

“Ha!” he sneered, “so my arrow hath not fallen so wide of the mark after all.”

“Sir,” said I, “at least be merciful enough to spare your child. She is innocent of all crimes, save that fearfully inhuman one called ‘gratitude.’”

“She has no need to be grateful,” he interrupted, haughtily. “Her love and duty should be mine, and mine only; not yours.”

“Aye, sir, ‘should be,’” I observed, significantly. “At the same time, ‘tis not much to wonder why they are not.”

“Harold! Harold!” cried Annie, throwing herself between us, “for God’s sake don’t! I cannot bear to see this.”

“O, you can’t, can’t you, mistress,” said her father, curling his lip, and with a haughty gesture that called Almyra to my mind. “You cannot bear to see all this, and yet you yourself have brought it on through want of duty, obedience, and—and love.”

“Sir,” she answered, in a low voice, “as a father you can command my obedience and duty.”

“Obedience and duty! May I ask if you are devoid of that sentiment, quality, or feeling commonly called love?”

“I love those who are kind to me,” she responded with simple dignity.

"Charmingly philosophical and logical that. So I suppose that *he*" (designating me) "has been 'kind' to you?"

"Yes."

"Very good. But as the future mistress of a fashionable house, I command, if you cannot forget, at least, never to see personally this gentleman who has been so kind to you. You were good enough to say I had your obedience and duty, so for the future I wish you to recollect this, the only rule I shall lay down for you to observe closely," he said, coldly.

Then, having bid me a sad, sad farewell, she left the home she loved so tenderly; left me, like her sister, to find one in a brighter and gayer sphere.

When I had let them both out of the great gate, and returned to the sunless house, now surrounded by the black shadows of night and change, and passed through those rooms the sisters had enlivened by their laughter and presence, I felt weary and dispirited. When I reflected on the combined losses of my dearly-loved friend and half-brother, of my love and my good angel, Annie, the loss of all my worldly possessions

faded into insignificance, and I sunk on a chair in a passion of unseen grief, and wished that the shadows of night would close round me for ever, so that I might never see the light of morning again.

Disappointed, heartsick, full of unavailing grief caused by this deluge of afflictions, I remained as if unable to raise my head again from the table on which it rested.

Suddenly I raised my eyes. Through the uncurtained-window straight before me I could see how black all was without ; only one little bright, beautiful star twinkled in the firmament, and sent a tiny streak of light upon my window-pane. Mine was a bitter, bitter burden to bear, and yet this seemed like a drop of balm to my wounded spirit. For as I saw that, although the heavens were dark around this solitary star, it still shone bravely, so did I know in my heavy heart, although all around was dense, a spark of hope lived still.









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